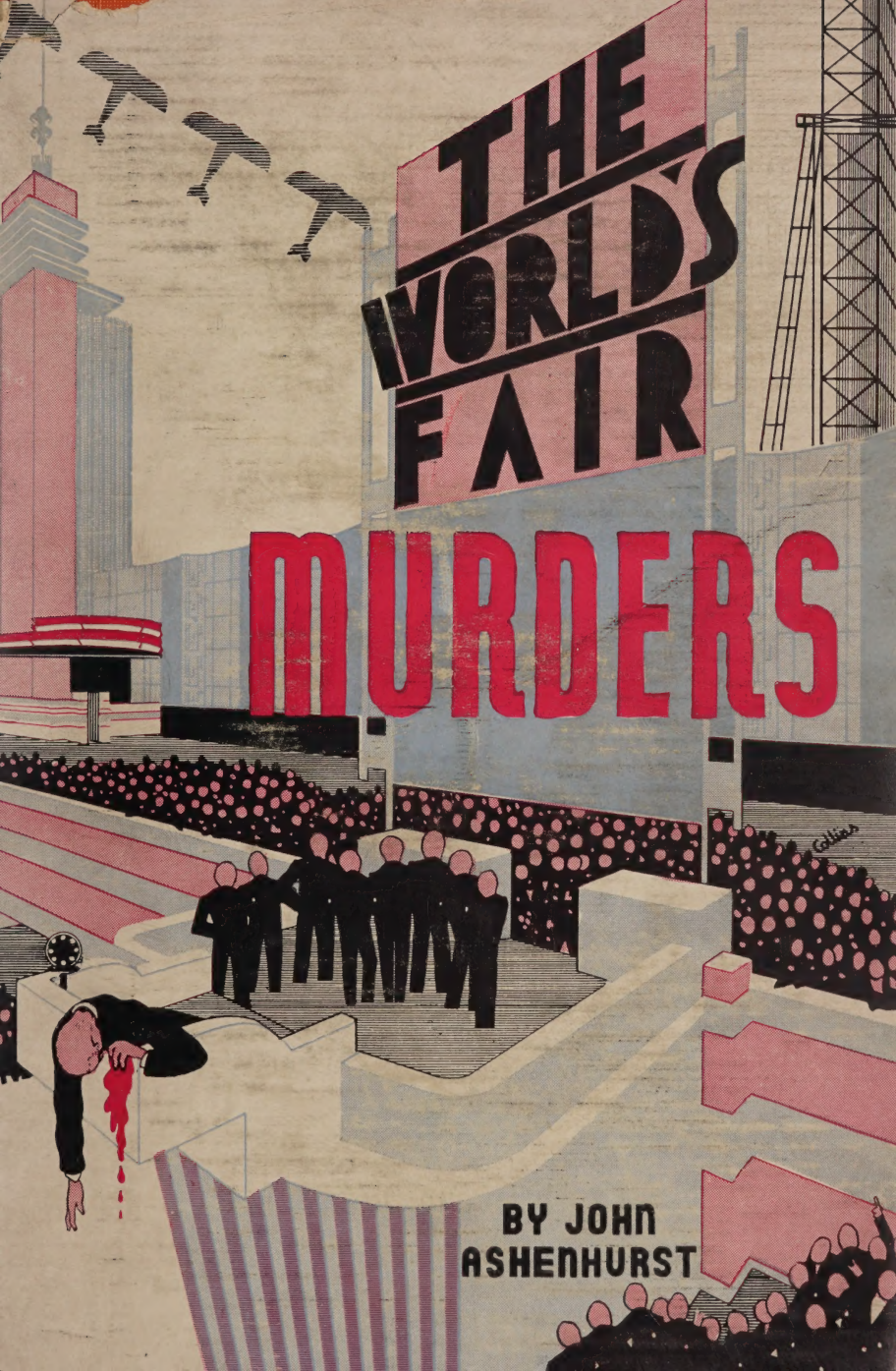


THE WORLD'S FAIR

MURDERS



BY JOHN
ASHENHURST

THE WORLD'S FAIR MURDERS

By John Ashenhurst

CHICAGO, June 5, 1933. Professor Arturo del Grafko of Almania steps from his train, is whisked to the Hall of Science at the Fair. In the vast Court of Honor, thousands have gathered to hear him speak. He is to announce an epoch-making invention, too important to be possessed by any one country, a secret to be disclosed simultaneously to the whole world. He mounts the rostrum, begins to speak. The roar of aëroplanes drowns out his voice. People look aloft; when they look back, the Professor has slumped to the floor. A bullet has pierced his heart. And not one among those thousands has seen or heard the shot!

Here is the beginning of a mystery that rocked the country from Maine to California. Here is a book as exciting as the Fair itself — a prize exhibit in the mystery story field.

The
World's
Fair
Murders

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THE WORLD'S FAIR MURDERS

THE WORLD'S FAIR MURDERS

BY
JOHN ASHENHURST



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1933

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THE WORLD'S FAIR MURDERS

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CHAPTER I

BENNETT GETS AN ASSIGNMENT

ON THE afternoon of June 5, when the World's Fair was barely a week old, Alison Bennett, veteran police reporter, walked up to the city desk of the *Journal*, one of Chicago's leading evening newspapers. He sauntered as well as he could through the knee-deep waves of papers which by that time in the afternoon always littered the floor, and stood beside his city editor, Harry Hoffman.

"For the love of Mike!" exclaimed Hoffman in astonishment, his cigar ashes making unseemly blemishes on the smiling face of Myna Lang staring up at him from a sheaf of glossy prints of movie stars which had just

been thrust into his hand by the same press agent who had given him the cigar. "What the devil are you doing around here at this time of day? It's only three o'clock, when all good police reporters should be playing poker at headquarters."

"But you forget the day, baby," answered Alison, casually surveying the latest edition of the *Journal*, and noting with some secret pride that the most recent theory on the Van Alstyn murder (which he had thought up all by himself) was in the right-hand column with a ninety-six point banner head.

"Well—what about the day?" began the city editor.

"It's Monday."

"Yes, but——"

"And Monday's payday."

"Good Lord, Al!" Hoffman expostulated. "Seriously, what are you doing over here at three o'clock? No kidding, something might break any minute on this Van Alstyn thing. You'd have me in an awful spot with the boss if they brought some new suspect in."

"Oh, it's all right, Harry. I called Nell and told her to tell you I'd left Billy Spofford

over there while I ran over to get my pay. Everything's O.K., and anyway Schmitz is going to call me here if anything turns up."

Harry Hoffman looked around quickly before he spoke again.

"Oh, I guess it won't matter, but with all these pay-cuts and this new boss from Washington I don't like to let anything slip up."

"Did I ever let you down?"

"You never got that cointreau."

"No, but seriously?"

"No, and you're not going to let me down now. I'm glad you came in, as a matter of fact. I've got something for you to do. You'll help me out of a tough hole."

Bennett didn't like the wheedling tone and he glanced significantly at the clock.

"Anything but an assignment," he smiled.

"But this is a short one."

"And I have a long evening ahead of me."

"You'll be all through by five-thirty."

"Oh, well, shoot."

"This Professor Arturo del Grafko of Almania is coming in at three-forty-five on the Pennsylvania. You know, the fellow who's going to reveal the secret of his world-shaking

invention at the Fair. There's going to be lots of whoopee at the station and he's being rushed right over to the Fair grounds for the formal welcome. It will all be over in a hurry."

"I don't wish to care for it."

"But you'll get a chance to see that swell artificial rainbow they're going to make over the Fair grounds with nine airplanes spitting colored smoke. Maybe you'll find a pot of gold!"

"I hear rainbows have gone off the gold standard."

"I haven't anyone else to send, Al."

"But where are Duffy and Sherman?"

"I sent Duffy up to Ypsilanti an hour ago. That co-ed heart-balm case is getting juicy and the Latin teacher is going to talk tomorrow. Sherm is working on that twelve-page special section for the Fair, and I can't stop him. I was going to send Helen Maynard, but you really can't trust a girl on a stunt like this. The big story probably won't break until tomorrow when he gives his invention to the world, but you can't tell what might happen."

"Oh, go on. Trust the little girl reporter. I like her and I think she'd do better than I

could. I can't interview old scientific dodos."

"Now, Al, he might get off the train and pass out a formal statement, spilling all the dope. You never can tell. Helen might call in and give me the color of his necktie and forget all about the statement. I'd feel much better if you were there."

"Well, O.K., but send her along too, to cover the women's angle. She'll feel better. And I duck after the reception at the train."

"No, you'd better go to the Fair grounds, too. We could make a short front-page re-plate up to five-thirty, and he just might give everything away in time to startle our two hundred and six late readers with the news. The A.M. papers will do the splurging on the welcome, but we've got to be covered and I'm in a spot."

Bennett sighed, lit a cigarette, and looked dispiritedly about the room. It was the time when, on afternoon papers, almost everybody has gone home. His pals on the early morning rewrite desk were gone. A blowsy girl reporter whose name he did not even know sat at a desk toward the rear and pecked away at a typewriter on a story that never would

be printed. The copy desk was reading next day's P.S. copy, the stuff that would appear in the early edition and then be killed for the real news stories, and their faces showed how bored they were.

"If I have to turn intellectual, how about a little background?" Bennett asked.

His city editor was smiling now, intensely relieved that he had a veteran on the job, even though somewhat out of his field. Even city editors miscalculate, and Harry had thought that Larrish would have telephoned in time to cover this assignment, but of course he hadn't. Bennett was really a godsend. How pleasant that he was so punctual in calling for his pay-check.

"Well, Al," he began with a rather patronizing air, which he immediately recognized himself and altered rather unsuccessfully into a tone of intellectual comradeship, "this fellow, whom you know by reputation, of course, is going to give to the world his latest discovery. He's going to tell us all about it at the Fair."

"What is it?"

The city editor couldn't decide whether to

blow up or puff his cigar. He chose the latter course but puffed so violently that more whiskers grew on the chin of Myna Lang and he brushed them off absent-mindedly while he collected his thoughts.

"Listen! If we knew I wouldn't be sending you down to the station. This is all a big mystery. You're supposed to find it out. If you don't the A.M.s will, and who cares?"

"I get it. Is there a photog?"

"Spears. He's already started over."

Helen Maynard appeared from somewhere. She was more attractive than many girl reporters and Bennett wished for a fleeting moment that he was not always immured in police headquarters.

"I understand," he said with an ingratiating smile, "that we are covering the world-wide mystery of Professor del Grafko together."

Her face fell, and although she quickly recovered her aplomb, Bennett inwardly cursed his city editor for not sending the girl alone.

"You cover the crowd angle," said Hoffman quickly, himself sensitive to the girl's

hurt pride. "Bennett here will try to get a word with the professor."

"Do you want me to 'phone in or shall I come back and write a story for the early editions?" the girl asked in a dead voice.

The city editor grew suddenly very gracious and lied nobly. The paper was tight, what with the Ypsilanti scandal and the Van Alstyn affair, but he must encourage this good-looking girl who did write very good stories now and then.

"Oh, no," he said. "Call in from the station. We'll be able to take a little color for the late editions. Who's there and that kind of thing. Mrs. Joseph Bohm will probably be around to pin a D.A.R. ribbon on the professor for his services to *la belle monde*, or something like that. We can use all that stuff."

The girl's cynical eyes brightened perceptibly. She knew that the city editor was lying, but his story sounded plausible. A damn good newspaper woman, he thought.

"Well, we're off," said Bennett, and they went out together.

"What time's this train due?" he asked her. He wanted her to feel that he was depending on her.

"Three-forty-five," she said. "We've got lots of time."

"See if you can spot a taxi," said Bennett as they left the elevator on the ground floor. "I must get some cigarettes. What kind do you smoke?"

"We've got time to walk," the girl answered.

"O.K.! We walk, and the cab goes on your swindle sheet," Bennett replied with a generous wave of the hand.

"Then I buy my own cigarettes," the girl said.

"Fair enough."

"Camels."

"Luckies."

CHAPTER II

TEN THOUSAND WITNESSES

ONCE out of the building, Bennett realized that he was somewhat elated over the prospect of seeing the famous professor whose amazing discoveries in the field of electricity had at intervals startled the world. Bennett was no ordinary police reporter. He had held the important central police beat for ten years, and until the depression had even for a time had an assistant to cover those little stories having to do with some old derelict found dead in an alley from a heart attack superinduced by drinking too much canned heat, minor accidents, raids on dubious gambling resorts, and all that kind of thing.

Bennett was somewhat of an anomaly to his fellow reporters, but he still managed to retain their respect. He had two years of university study to his credit, an amazing background for a man who must spend his days in the dreary press room of the central

police station playing fan-tan, pinochle, or spit-in-the-ocean between the minor excitements of the daily round of metropolitan crime. To his credit let it be said that Bennett was "one of the boys." What did it matter if he read a book or two now and then? This weird predilection of his for literary relaxation had merely earned for him the facetious sobriquet of "the police reporter who could read and write," and he didn't mind, nor did his confrères. As a matter of fact, Bennett was sometimes even allowed to write his own stories and he didn't do badly at all. He was acquainted with quite a few colorful adjectives and his adverbs usually ended in "ly." All in all, he was a respected reporter among his fellow workers and his close friendship with Bernard Schmitzendorf, chief of detectives, was extremely worrying to his friendly rivals on the police beat.

It was not strange, then, that Bennett, as he walked toward the station with the pretty girl reporter at his side, felt some of the importance of his assignment. Professor del Grafko was a world figure. News of his inventions appeared in the *New Republic* as

well as in *Popular Mechanics*. In other words, he was a man about whom everybody should know. And the reporter was pleased that he did know something about him. The professor had earned the title of the "wizard" in his own country because of his magic in the laboratory. That, of course, was the kind of title that would be given him by one of those backward Balkan nations. As a matter of fact, however, his discoveries were miraculous, the more so because he immediately recognized their practical application to the modern world, to the infinite advantage of the human race.

This latest discovery, which the professor, with much ballyhoo obviously not of his own doing, was going to give to mankind at the Century of Progress Exposition, had been heralded throughout the newspapers of the world in that veiled way in which foreign correspondents write about something which they are sure is significant, but about which they know nothing. Bennett was sure that it was very important, but he hadn't the slightest idea what it was all about. It must have

been important, else the professor would not have bothered to come all the way to America to reveal it. Or perhaps the professor was just a bit cracked. No, Bennett thought, not this professor. Many were, he knew from reading their books, but this old man had so much of the milk of human kindness in him, he was so much of a man, that he could not now, in his old age, be barking up a tree of another color. No, this really must be something stupendous. Perhaps the old professor would step off the train and announce that he had just learned how babies can be born with a full knowledge of how to read the stock ticker, or that he had discovered how to stop war painlessly, or how to make money from cigarette ashes.

Blah! They were nearing the station and Bennett suddenly came back to earth and realized that he would have another dull assignment to cover—roaring crowds made up chiefly of people of a nationality strange to him, the usual curiosity-seekers, a few pedantic professors, some of the professional civic greeters, reporters, photographers, officious

police. He looked down at the girl beside him and smiled.

"Were you working on newspapers when Marty Larkin, the cop shooter, came home to this station with flashlights and movie torches all over the place?" he asked.

She smiled back. "I remember mother telling me about that along with the story of the bad wolf who ate grandma and other wicked things," she said.

"Pardon me," the reporter begged. "You are young, and, shall I say, beautiful, but that age-old wisdom in your eyes confused me about your real years on this earth. I'm sorry. But it was a swell sight. And somebody in the crowd copped a watch out of the pocket of the chief of detectives who came down to take the master criminal in charge. It was pretty swell."

"They don't make stories like that any more," the girl sighed.

"No," said Bennett, "they don't. But perhaps it's because we're getting old and they don't have the kick they used to have."

"I think they're really duller," the girl replied. "I think the depression works on

news the same way it does on the stock market. Things never seem as exciting to me as the stories that reporters tell about the good old days."

Inside the rotunda of the Union Station there was a large crowd. Bennett had never liked this station—the rotunda was too large to suit his fancy. There were too many chances for celebrities to be lost in the wastes of the Mongolian deserts. The La Salle Street Station, now, was a fine place. Any time anyone stepped off the Century and walked out into the concourse through another gate, he was trapped, and before he could find the way out of his cage, he had been successfully snapped a few times and had uttered two or three sentences which were good for a half-column interview.

"A lot of people really seem to think this fellow is pretty important," the girl said as she observed the crowd. "Maybe I'd better 'phone something in to the desk."

"I'd get a name or two before I called," Bennett suggested. "Let's mill about a bit and find out who are the leaders in this great reception."

They walked down into the crowd. Suddenly a voice boomed out.

"Hey!" it said. "Who's shot?"

Bennett looked up with a sharp curl of defiance on his lips. He had recognized immediately the implication in the challenge.

"They're going to hook the professor for failing to declare his 1927 income tax," he answered. "It looks like a big indictment."

"No kidding," said Dyer of the *News*, advancing toward them. "Are you actually covering this assignment? I knew they were hard up over on your sheet, but I didn't think they had beat men out on these assignments in the higher mental sphere."

"Nuts," said Bennett.

He looked for his companion. She was chatting with Mrs. Joseph Bohm, who was standing near the gate of the track on which the train was scheduled to arrive. Mrs. Bohm was sweating slightly, but no doubt with some charm, and held in her hand a red leather box containing a decoration which she hoped to pin on the professor's lapel. He heard with amusement the mock deference in the voice of the girl reporter as she plied Mrs. Bohm

with questions. Not so dumb, that girl, he thought.

Standing practically on the toes of a very bored gate attendant were two sleek and shining males, the consul and vice-consul of Almania. Sig. Alfredo Benefio, the consul, was all smiles as he held his hand motion-picture camera over his head and took a view of the crowd which filled the station. Giorgio Renzi, his assistant, a smaller man, was taking things calmly and seemed a little bored. To one side was a group of college professors in unfrayed clothes, the welcoming committee of Chicago's scientific fraternity, who wished to do the proper thing by this brother of theirs who had never before visited America, but whose works were known by the humblest of aspirants for the B.S. degree.

The leader of the group was Professor Julius Stieger of the physics department of the University of Chicago. A decade ago he had been a bitter professional enemy of the visiting savant, but their ripening years had apparently caused the two men to forget their quarrel over a question so abstruse that the

average man would not have known whether it was worth fighting about or not.

Bennett saw the girl reporter disappear toward the waiting room and knew that, always hopeful, she was telephoning the "color" to a bored but indulgent city editor.

The teletype ticker at the information desk clicked a few times and the attendant pulled down the blackboard and chalked up the fact, against the already known premise, that the train would arrive on time, that track No. 6 would have the honors. This was really very little in the way of excitement since it merely expressed the previous consensus of the probable final destination of the New York train, but the news, as it swept through the crowd, sufficed to produce a surging toward the anointed gate. The murmur of the crowd grew louder and more confusing.

At the gate the bored attendant, without change of expression, allowed reporters and photographers to slip through and even passed a half-dozen of the welcoming committee, including the two men from the consular office.

The awkward-looking locomotive with its

irritating mechanical bell clanked past and came to a stop at the bumper. The always ebullient express men waved from the baggage cars, the coach passengers from the front two cars slunk away with that quiet shame which their kind always displays when arriving on a train where the red-caps center all their attention on the Pullman passengers. Some bright-eyed "cub" who had been poring over the professor's pictures for the past two days spotted the venerable savant through a window in the fifth car back. Photographers sprang to vantage-posts on baggage trucks, reporters crowded around the steps and delayed the other passengers.

The consul rushed forward as the old professor began descending the stairs. The distinguished visitor seemed a bit dazed with this welcome and murmured something about his baggage. The chief welcomers in one voice assured him that all was well and some insignificant but beaming person immediately conferred with red-caps and arrangements were made that he should have the honor of conveying the bags to the professor's room at the Drake.

To the volley of questions the professor answered in not too broken English, "I can have nothing to say now."

He looked around him with a queer but kindly smile on his face.

"Can't you just make a statement about your impressions of America?" the reporters urged.

"America is a magnificent spectacle," the professor said slowly. "I am pleased that I have come here."

They were walking up the platform now toward the gates behind which they could see the huge crowd milling.

"Are they waiting to see me?" the professor asked with some bewilderment.

"Certainly," the consul assured him. "This is a great moment for the Almanians of Chicago. You must give them a greeting."

The professor looked embarrassed. Then he held his hand aloft and waved it a few times gently. It was far from the proud gesture of a conquering hero, but the crowd understood its friendly intention and shouted with enthusiasm.

Flashlights brightened the high ceilings as

the crowd walked toward the automobile exit. Bennett strode to a telephone.

"Usual stuff," he told the rewrite man briefly. "Great welcome. Professor would have nothing to say. He's a nice old gent, white beard, Continental clothes. Looks as if he doesn't know what it's all about. He was pleased all right, but he didn't spill a thing."

"The desk wants to talk to you, Al."

"Yeah? Aw, Harry, I don't want to get into that jam over there. The A.M.s will get it. He isn't going to tell the great secret for a couple of days. Oh, all right."

Bennett hopped into a cab and sped to the Fair grounds.

On the magnificent rostrum within the enclosing arms of the Hall of Science, the welcoming group was already assembled and the professor was being led to the platform. Thousands milled below.

Somehow no one had thought that the celebration taking place just beyond, of the anniversary of the Chinese victory at Pu Yoh, might interfere with the welcome of the professor. The roar of the fireworks and aërial bombs was terrific. The professor seemed al-

most terrified as he was led to the speaker's stand to make his few remarks of formal appreciation of his welcome. Then there was what Al thought a nauseating speech of greeting, interrupted by the incessant noise of the great air bombs. The professor arose to answer the greeting with a smile that by now was calm and a little deprecating.

As he opened his mouth to speak, the attention of the crowd suddenly left him, and he gazed with them at the spectacle in the sky.

Nine airplanes, with a terrific roar, zoomed over the rostrum, just clearing the cables of the sky-ride, leaving behind them a prismatic trail of colored smoke which wavered only faintly in the quiet afternoon sky. The western sun shone on the artificial rainbow and made some strange chemical component of the colored smoke glisten in a pale way, like a real rainbow. A low chorus of *Oh*s and *Ah*s went up from the crowd. As the roar of the airplanes died away in the far sky, all eyes again turned toward the professor.

Harry Hoffman had his hat and coat on. He was "ducking" for the day. He came

back from his locker to the city desk. His assistant, Jimmy Felz, a telephone at his ear, had his feet on the waste-basket and was evidently talking to his girl. A little red light flashed on the telephone box. Instinctively, Hoffman pulled the button and picked up the instrument.

"Yeah, Bennett."

"I've got a story, man!"

"Tell it to Felz, Bennett. I'm ducking."

"Jesus, Harry! This is real. The professor's been shot."

"Bad?"

"Dead. Right through the heart."

"Where?"

"Right here on the Fair grounds in front of ten thousand people. Let's have Mike and I'll give him the dope."

"Mike!" shouted Hoffman to the rewrite man, "take this on line sixty-three for a replate on the last edition. Ed, call the press-room and tell them to stop the run! Shoot this fudge."

The city editor forgot to take his hat off as he started to scribble with nervous hands.

CHAPTER III

A BULLET IN THE FLOOR

MURDER AT WORLD'S FAIR BAFFLES POLICE

**All-Night Investigation Fails To Produce
Any Clue In Mysterious Daylight
Slaying At Fair Grounds**

BY ALISON BENNETT

CHICAGO, Ill., June 6.—While a shocked and horrified world today awaited further news on the mysterious slaying yesterday of Professor Arturo del Grafko of Almania in full view of thousands assembled at the Hall of Science at the Century of Progress Exposition, Chicago police expressed

themselves as with hardly a clue or even a theory as to how the professor had met his death.

The professor was shot dead yesterday afternoon while standing on the rostrum in the Court of Honor. He died instantly and it is believed that the bullet pierced his heart, although the formal report of the coroner's physician was awaited today to establish this fact definitely.

Estimates are that ten thousand persons were within eyesight of the tragedy, but a full night of investigation by police did not produce a single witness who saw the shooting.

"We have never had such a baffling case to contend with," said chief of detectives Bernard Schmitzendorf today. "There were more than ten thousand witnesses and we can't find a single person who saw the professor shot. We can't even find anyone who heard a shot. So far, we have not been able to establish a motive for the crime."

An eye-witness account of the event was given by Sig. Alfredo Benefio, consul of Almanian, who was seated behind the professor.

Sig. Benefio was extremely agitated when

questioned by police after he had helped carry the body of his countryman to the emergency ambulance which had been summoned.

"We were all waiting for the professor to speak," he said, "when suddenly a number of airplanes appeared overhead, spurting colored smoke behind them like a rainbow. They were flying very low and the noise of the motors was deafening. I confess I was irritated because the clamor of the Chinese celebration nearby had already marred the speech of welcome given the professor. Nevertheless, like all the others, I gazed upward at the magnificent sight as the airplanes zoomed almost straight up and just cleared the cables of the sky-ride. When they were high in the sky and noise of the motors and subsided, the crowd stopped its cheering and we all looked back to the professor.

"I was horrified to see him slumped down on the rostrum. I rushed up to him with a cry and others crowded about. I took him in my arms and he was very limp. I begged him to speak to me, but I could see at once that he was dead, or almost dead. One of

the professors who was on the platform examined him and said that he was already dead. I was frantic."

The professor referred to was Dr. Frederick Mundt of the biology department of the University of Chicago.

"I had been looking at the airplanes," he said, "and when I looked down again, I saw the professor in a heap on the platform and Sig. Benefio rushing toward him. I went over and felt the professor's pulse. His heart had already stopped. Death must have been instantaneous."

Preliminary investigation of the grounds by police last night revealed only one clue. Embedded in the composition flooring of the platform directly behind the rostrum, police found a steel-jacketed .22-calibre bullet. This was buried in the floor about nine feet behind the spot where the professor was standing.

"The professor was obviously killed by someone who fired from an elevation nearby," declared chief of detectives Schmitzendorf. "We immediately threw a guard about all nearby buildings, but could find no one armed within them, except watchmen

carrying regulation police revolvers of .38-calibre. All watchmen and attendants were questioned, but could give no report of any suspicious characters entering or leaving any of the buildings. Because of the large crowds present on the grounds, it was extremely difficult to single out any suspects."

Police declared that the killing of the professor was a bit of "sheer luck" on the part of the unknown assassin. Killers usually use a large soft bullet or slugs in order to insure death, and the small calibered steel-jacketed bullet would have produced probably a very slight injury had it not passed through the heart.

The type of missile used is extremely unusual as .22-calibre bullets are not usually steel-jacketed. This served to add even more mystery to an already mysterious crime.

Bennett took a drink of lukewarm coffee out of the milk bottle at his elbow and shouted to Hoffman at the city desk.

"I don't have to write all the junk about who the professor was and where he came from and all that, do I?" he said.

"No," Hoffman answered. "Mike wrote that before you got in. We'll pick that up on the tail of your story."

"How about that statement from the Business Men's Association that this was a blow to the civic pride of Chicago, a man getting shot at the Fair grounds where even little children are supposed to be safe?"

"That's a separate yarn—a box on page one. Don't you worry about the civic aspects of this. You stick to the police end. It's a blot on your record that you don't know who shot this guy."

Bennett took another drink of coffee and lit a cigarette.

"Yeah?" he said. "It's a blot on the professor that somebody wanted to shoot him so badly that they'd do it right in the middle of a celebration. Gentlemen get murdered quietly in their libraries just two minutes after Jeems, the butler, has retired after giving them their last whiskey and soda for the night. I know because I read it in a lot of books."

"Never mind, Bennett, you'd better get over

to headquarters and follow up today's investigation. There'll be a lot doing."

"The coroner's physician is reporting at 10 A.M. I'm at the Brevoort until then—in Room 451, alone, asleep."

"O.K. Al, but give us a ring at ten for the early markets edition."

"Right."

Bennett walked wearily from the office. It was seven o'clock in the morning and he had not slept all night. For the first three hours after the murder he had stayed at the Fair grounds, following the chief of detectives around, listening eagerly to the report of each new squad as they came back from the search of the nearby buildings.

In all his years of newspaper life he had never covered such an exciting assignment. Once in his career he had arrived on the spot ten minutes after a gang slaughter, and had watched the helpers from the coroner's office pile bleeding corpses into stretchers. He had observed, from a safe vantage-point, the police bomb a maniac out of a second-story flat in the face of volleys of shots. He had even been in a squad car which engaged in a speed-

ing gun battle with a fleeing automobile loaded with gangsters. But never had he been an actual witness to a murder perpetrated in the midst of a crowd of ten thousand or more people and never before had he experienced personally the full implication of that term, "mob psychology." He had not written of the panic which ensued the evening before when the murder took place. That was a separate story, written by Helen, the girl reporter, and she had done a good job of it. He had seen her only once after the shooting, staring white-faced at the surging crowd and trying to edge her way nearer the group around the professor. He admired her grit and was pleased that she had written so well of what she had seen when he knew from that one look at her face that she must have been so terrified it was a wonder she remembered anything.

At first no one in the crowd below and few on the platform had realized what had happened to the professor. The crowd waited with restless attention for the beginning of Professor del Grafko's speech after the airplanes had passed, and saw only the group

crowded around the spot where he had a moment before been standing. The noise of the Chinese fireworks continued. People glanced from one to the other with that "has he fainted?" look when suddenly those nearest the platform became aware of what had happened. The news traveled through the multitude like the ripple of wind over a field of wheat. Here and there a woman screamed. Even before those at the edge of the crowd had realized the tragedy, the on-lookers nearest the platform were seeking to get away from the scene. That is, most of them were. But as they strove to leave, those ever-present curiosity-seekers, the kind of people who always stand and watch an unfortunate having an epileptic fit, were struggling to get nearer. The police and Fair attendants had difficulty in controlling the crowd, suddenly gone frantic with a strange fear.

The word had swept like wildfire that the professor had been shot. This seemed too incredible to be believed, yet, if true, so fantastic that perhaps the next moment more bullets would fly.

By the time the emergency ambulance ar-

rived, there was little need to clear a lane. The crowd around the rostrum had dissolved, except for the curiosity-seekers near the platform who had to be driven away by the police, and already down as far as Twenty-Ninth Street people were saying, "Did you hear about it? That famous professor was shot."

The police investigation had been as thorough as it could be under the circumstances. All night, at headquarters, Chief Schmitzen-dorf and his aids had questioned man after man, those who were on the platform, those who were beside it, those who had come from the train with the professor, those who had merely met him at the rostrum.

It was Bennett who discovered the bullet hole in the floor of the platform about an hour after the shooting. The rostrum was clear by then and he had gone back to study the scene and see what he could make of the strange death. He immediately called a sergeant when he noticed a small hole in the floor, with a little trough in front of it where the bullet had cut through at an angle before burying itself in the composition flooring. The sergeant tried to dig out the bullet with

his pocket knife, but failed, and they finally found a workman who went at the job with a small cold chisel and hammer, soon uncovering the tiny bullet, sharp-pointed and steel-jacketed.

"Well, of all the things I ever see to kill a man with, that's the strangest," the sergeant exclaimed.

Bennett agreed. So did the chief, but it immediately gave them all a fairly definite line of reasoning to work on.

"See where this fellow was standing," said Bennett to the chief, "and see where that bullet hit? He was shot from above, and there's no doubt of that, Schmitz."

They looked around them. There were only two places from which a shot could possibly have come, one the end of the wing of the Science Building itself, and the other the electrical group far away across the lagoon.

Suddenly Schmitzendorf looked up and pointed his finger in the air.

"Look at that," he said.

"What?" Bennett inquired.

"That rocket car on the sky-ride there."

"Yeah?"

"He could have been shot out of that."

"Now, listen, Schmitz. Do you happen to know any man in the world who could shoot from a moving carriage and hit a man straight through the heart at I don't know how many yards distance?"

The chief shook his head.

"But it isn't impossible," he said.

"But a man would have to have a rifle and take careful aim," Bennett argued. "I'll bet this fellow was shot with a rifle by a man who lay down and rested his elbow and took a long, slow aim."

"Just the same," the chief said, "I'm going to investigate the sky-ride angle."

The two squads he sent to each one of the towers of the sky-ride came back to him that night at nine o'clock when he was at headquarters, listening to the futile questioning of witnesses.

"No, we didn't hear a shot," said witness after witness. "The airplanes made so much noise we couldn't hear a thing. No, we didn't see him fall. No. No. No."

The chief looked up with relief when his men came in.

"Every car that went across between four and five o'clock was full, or so full it don't make any difference," Lieutenant Dixon told him. "We questioned all the attendants and they swear nobody could have shot out of the cars without their knowing it, and I don't see but what they're right."

After less than three hours' sleep in his room at the Brevoort, Bennett was called at nine-forty-five. Without getting out of bed he called police headquarters. Nothing new.

"Is Doc O'Malley there? Let me have him. That you, Doc? What about the prof?"

After a three-minute conversation with the doctor, Bennett called the city desk.

"You might make a new lead on the fact that the professor was shot through the heart by a bullet which passed directly through his body at an angle of thirty degrees," he said. "That makes the theory of the shot coming from above stand up."

"That's fine," said Hoffman, "and when you get through with telling that to Mike, we want you to run right in to Schmitz and suggest that he call all those aviators in for

questioning. Tell him we're already printing the fact that he is calling them, so he'd better come across."

"What's the idea of the aviators?"

"Well, if you're so sure he was shot from above, couldn't one of those fellows in the planes have done it?"

"Good Lord, how dumb I am! Who thought of that?"

"Your little girl reporter had the idea," said the city editor. "It may not be such a bad one. Better ask the chief what he thinks."

Al slammed down the telephone.

"He couldn't have been shot from an airplane!" he assured himself again. "That's an impossibility."

Suddenly he recovered his spirits and smiled to himself.

"It makes good news, though," he grinned. "That gal has a nose for it all right."

CHAPTER IV

A DEAD MAN IN A TAXI

BENNETT called the chief.

"Say, Schmitz," he began, "How about calling those fliers?"

"What's the big idea?" Schmitz grumbled.

"Why, they might have shot this guy. You're surely going to question them."

"You don't believe a man in an airplane could plug a fellow through the heart when he was going along at more than a hundred miles an hour?"

"Leave no stone unturned."

"I thought we talked this over last night."

"We did, but I've changed my mind."

"I haven't changed mine. I'm not going to make a fool of myself and have everybody laughing at me."

"Listen, Schmitz, I really think there might be something to it."

"I don't!"

"Anyway," Al began pleading, "our paper

is printing the story that you're calling the fliers in and I don't think I can stop them."

"That's fine. I hope you can't. Who's running this investigation anyway, the detective bureau or the *Journal*?"

"Listen, Schmitz. It'll be good publicity for you. Come on. Bring them in."

"What made you get so excited about this all of a sudden?"

"Oh, I've been thinking it over. The thought just came to me that maybe the shot could have come from a plane. You'd feel silly if it had and you didn't call those fellows in."

"Oh, all right," the chief grumbled. "But I'm not going to waste my time for you like this very often. Put that in your pipe and smoke it."

"Thanks, Schmitzy. I'll do something for you sometime."

Bennett dressed rapidly, stopped at a restaurant for a quick cup of coffee and a sandwich, and took a State Street car down to headquarters. He was admitted to the chief's office, where he found him questioning Benefio, the consul. This gentleman was some-

what haggard from his experiences of the night, but he had shaved and was as impeccably dressed as ever. The chief exchanged nods with the reporter as Bennett entered.

"Can't you think of any possible motive for the shooting of this man?" the chief was asking.

"Not a thing, not a thing!" The consul shrugged his shoulders despairingly.

"Could it be anything political? I read in the papers that things aren't so quiet in your country."

Another shrug. "I don't see how it could be. Professor del Grafko had no particular political affiliations."

"Just what is the political situation in Almania?"

"Well, like many countries in Europe, there are two parties which are struggling for power, the fascisti and the communists."

"And the professor?"

"He was neither, as far as I know."

"And you?"

"I am the appointee of the present government."

"And that is?"

The consul gave a well-bred but obvious grimace at the ignorance of his questioner.

"The present party in power," he said coldly, "is said by the newspapers to be fascist in its leanings. As a matter of fact——"

"Never mind that," the chief interrupted. "Was the present government glad to have the professor come over here to reveal his invention?"

"I understand," the consul answered, "that the professor came here with the full knowledge of the king and also of the premier, but the premier is a weak——" he hesitated.

"What's that?"

"I mean the premier doesn't have quite the patriotic attitude which many people think he should have. Many people think the professor should have been forced to reserve the honor of revealing this invention to our own country."

"Do you know what this invention was?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"That will do. But we want you to stay on tap so that we can question you whenever we feel like it. This investigation may reveal a lot of things which we will have to ask you

about since we don't know a great deal about your country."

The consul started to reply, but then thought better of it. Before leaving the room, however, he made a request.

"Is it all right with the police if we take charge of the body and see that it has the treatment which the remains of so great a man deserve?" he asked.

"We've wired the professor's family," the chief answered. "We should soon have an answer regarding what they want done with the remains and that is certainly none of our business. I'll let you know as soon as I get an answer and you can probably attend to anything the family wants."

"Very good, sir," the consul answered and bowed himself from the room.

The chief turned to the sergeant at the door.

"Bring in that other fellow, the vice-consul," he said.

"Yes, sir. Three of those aviators are here already."

"We'll take them next."

Mr. Renzi, the vice-consul, smaller,

younger, but equally as dapper as his chief, came in. Once again he was questioned about the circumstances leading up to the shooting, and the actual event. He could shed no light on the matter.

"What is your political affiliation?" the chief suddenly asked him.

"I am a civil service employee," the vice-consul answered.

"But your politics?"

"I secured my appointment under the former government."

"And that was?"

"The Republican party."

"Your boss says there are only two parties, the fascisti and communists. What about that?"

"He is rabid on the subject because he is a fascisti. There are many parties in my country. His party is afraid of the communists and can see no other enemy."

"Do you think that politics could have had anything to do with the death of the professor?"

"Oh, no. He was never connected with any political party. He was a true scientist."

"What was this invention?"

"I do not know."

"That will do. But we may want to question you again."

"Very good, sir," said the vice-consul, and he, too, bowed himself out.

"Do you think we are getting anywhere?" the chief asked. "I didn't want to worry them by too much questioning now, but I thought they were a little excited about politics. Those Europeans act like that."

"I don't know," Bennett answered. "The motive is important, but it would also be a good idea to see if we can find out who shot this fellow and how. We at least have a bullet and a theory and those are both in our field. Balkan politics are a little out of my line."

"I guess you're right," the chief responded, "and I hope your theory is right too. By the way, what is this theory you're talking about?"

"Don't get me wrong. I don't mean to say I've got the whole thing figured out. When I talk about a theory, I mean simply a theory of how to proceed."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean we should begin with what we know and work hard from that angle, meanwhile trying to find out more about the things we don't know—like this foreign politics angle."

"Politics is out for the moment, then," the chief declared. "Let's take a whack at those fliers. I still don't see why that's a better theory than the sky-ride, though."

"The fliers were much closer," Bennett answered, "but of course, it would be just luck if one of them hit him. I admit that. You can't shoot a man in the heart from a flying plane as well as you could from the sky-ride cars, but of course, there wouldn't be as good a chance of being seen if you were alone in a plane."

Bennett left the room to call his office and returned half an hour later.

The questioning of the fliers seemed fruitless. There was so little to ask. None of them had been aware of the tragedy until they learned about it later, they said. None of them carried arms. Several of them pointed out that it would have been impossible to shoot from their planes without hitting the nearby

ship of a comrade. Things went this way until the seventh man was questioned. He was young, tall and good-looking, Andrew Karmatz. His answers were as unproductive as the others until the chief asked, "Your nationality?"

"I am an Almanian, sir," he responded.

"Like the professor?"

"Yes, sir."

Neither Bennett nor the chief allowed their faces to show any surprise. After all, this was not enough evidence to convict a man.

"Do you habitually carry firearms in your plane?" the chief asked.

"Yes, sir," was the quiet reply.

"What kind?"

"A .45 automatic."

"Do you have it with you?"

"No, I carry it only when I am in the plane."

"Why?"

"Well, you have no doubt read newspaper stories just as I have about passengers going crazy in airplanes and killing the pilot. Just the other day there was a story in the papers about a fellow who tried to steal a plane and

killed the pilot while they were in mid-air. I just want to have a fighting chance, that's all, in case anything like that happened to me."

"Did you have a passenger yesterday when you were flying in the rainbow formation?"

"No, but I always carry the gun in a pocket of my flying outfit as a regular habit."

"Is that the only gun you have?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you know this professor personally?"

"No, sir."

"Know anyone who did?"

"No, sir."

"Know any reason why anybody should want to kill him? Know what his invention was? Have any idea?"

The tall pilot returned a negative answer to all questions.

"What plane were you in?"

"Number nine."

"The westernmost one?"

"Yes, sir."

The chief thought a moment. Then he looked straight at the aviator.

"You wouldn't mind letting a police officer

make an examination of your home and your quarters at the hangar, would you? It would save the necessity of a search warrant."

"Not at all, sir. At any time."

The chief asked the aviator to step into the next room and phoned for Lieutenant Murphy.

"Go to that fellow's home with him and make a thorough search for a .22-calibre pistol," he said. "Search everywhere else where he keeps any belongings. Take a squad with you and keep watch on him while you are searching. He may be trying to bluff this out. Better frisk him too."

Being a veteran police reporter, Bennett had no compunctions about damaging reputations on slight evidence, and he went to the press room to tell the boys from the other papers what had occurred and to telephone to his paper with the news of the suspicious angles which had been discovered about the Almanian aviator.

It was the best piece of suspicion uncovered to date in the investigation and the reporters added a little flourish here and there to make it just a little better.

In the press room Al got the news as to what was happening on the other phases of the story.

"The Fair authorities think they have been gypped," Jimmy Nolan told him. "They're sore about the shooting and they're blaming the police. They're also excited because they can't pull off the big show they had been intending to, and they've cabled the professor's laboratory in Europe asking if somebody else can't give the invention to the waiting world."

"I wonder where this wonderful exhibit is?" mused Bennett. "It has to be somewhere."

"Oh, the Exposition is after that, too," Nolan explained. "They're trying to trace any shipment through the railroads, the express company, and they've wired to the Italian lines in New York, too. They're going to show that thing, or bust."

"It's very strange that nothing has showed up," Bennett said. "What do they say over at the Fair grounds?"

"They don't know anything about it. The professor just bought so much floor space and wrote that he would install his entire exhibit when he got here," Nolan answered.

"That all seems a little queer," Bennett replied. "But I can't figure it out."

Talbot of the city press came in, a light of excitement in his eyes.

"Has the cub got a little scooplet?" inquired Nolan.

"A pretty good automobile accident."

Nolan yawned and wearily took out a pencil. "Let's have the dope," he said.

All the men took notes while the young reporter recited the details. Then each phoned his paper.

"Anything new on the prof?" Felz asked Bennett.

"Not a single new," said Bennett. "I've got a little squib here on an auto ax you might want. Man killed on Michigan Avenue when a fire truck hits his taxi."

If he had known the true significance of his "squib," he would not have been so casual as he gave the details to the rewrite man.

CHAPTER V

"THEY DROPPED LIKE FLIES"

THE first stress of the big story had worn off. Bennett had given up his room at the Brevoort and was back at his own apartment. At six o'clock the next morning, the jangling of the telephone aroused him. Taylor, who had the early trick on the city desk, was on the wire.

As he talked, Bennett blinked and his brain suddenly sky-rocketed into full wakefulness. He sat up in bed and pressed the telephone more closely to his ear.

"What's that?" he shouted. "My God! Five of them? All at once? How about Schmitz? He wasn't one of them. That's good, but how the devil did it happen?"

"Nobody knows," Taylor said briefly. "You'd better get going."

"O.K." Bennett assured him. "I'll give you a ring at seven-thirty from headquarters with all the dope I can get."

Despite the fact that it was a warm June

morning, he shivered as he jumped into his clothes, and hurried from the apartment.

"Yes, there it was, leering at him from the news stand on the corner. He tossed down three pennies and picked up the paper. He stared at the heavy bold headline which stretched across the top of the front page.

FIVE POLICE DIE IN MYSTERY

Flipping a southbound Broadway car, Bennett found a seat near the front, and folding his paper vertically in the manner of a veteran rider in crowded cars, began with sickening apprehension to read the strange and horrible story.

Five police officers died suddenly within half an hour of each other late yesterday at detective bureau headquarters, 1121 S. State Street [he read].

Up to an early hour this morning no satisfactory explanation had been found to account for the sudden deaths.

The only known factor common to all those who died was that all had examined a

large brown suitcase containing some unusual mechanical or electrical contrivance. This suitcase was found in the wrecked taxicab in which an unidentified man was crushed to death yesterday afternoon on Michigan Avenue when the taxi in which he was riding was struck by a speeding fire truck.

Then followed a tabulated list of the dead, and Bennett noticed with a lump in his throat that his pal, Lieutenant Murphy, was one of the victims of the strange mystery. He read avidly the rest of the story—the aftermath of the late afternoon “auto-ax” he had telephoned in so casually just before quitting work yesterday. There were all the details of the accident—how the fire truck had not overturned, but zigzagged to a dizzy stop at the peril of motorists and pedestrians, how the passenger had been taken, fatally crushed, from the cab, while the driver, seriously injured and unconscious, had been rushed to St. Luke’s hospital.

The mysterious suitcase, strangely undamaged, had been taken to headquarters as a matter of routine. The suitcase remained

unopened until a thorough examination of the dead man's clothing at the morgue showed that there was not a single identifying item either in or on the clothes. All labels had been removed from the suit and even the trademark tags had been cut from the underclothing. The pockets contained nothing but a watch, some two hundred dollars in cash, two handkerchiefs, and a .38 automatic revolver. The details of the examination of the suitcase and the mysterious deaths which followed it were rather fully given, but Bennett heard them over again as soon as he reached headquarters and all the reporters gathered solemnly in the chief's office.

Schmitzendorf was alternating between apoplectic rage and subdued and sorrowful bewilderment.

"It's the damnedest thing I ever saw," he declared, pounding his desk with baffled fury. "Five of my best men gone for no reason at all. Dropped as if they had been smitten by the hand of God."

"It was certainly a strange coincidence," ventured Talbot of the city press.

The chief swung round and glared at him. "Coincidence, hell!" he roared. "It was murder, or worse! If I ever find out who built that infernal contraption in that suitcase, I'll give him a taste of a little electrical device that he can enjoy sitting down—and we won't turn off the juice until he's a cinder."

Only Bennett dared, after this outburst, to question the chief's certainty.

"Are you sure," he asked, "that it was the suitcase?"

"What else could it have been?"

"I don't know, but no one seems to know what this suitcase is all about, and people aren't killed by little contraptions like this—or at least by any that I've ever heard about."

"Well, all the fellows are dead who examined the suitcase," the chief said stubbornly.

"Did any others touch it?" Bennett asked.

A defeated look came into the chief's eyes.

"Well, yes," he said. "In all, there were nine of them who looked at the thing and handled it," he said. "The other four are still alive and feeling fine, but believe me they're scared stiff. They're waiting for the

axe of doom to fall any minute. I let them all off and sent them over to Paddy Ryan's saloon to play pinochle. This is no time for discipline." He relighted his soggy cigar. "But all the ones that are dead monkeyed with the thing. Don't forget that!" he added defiantly.

"This calls for a little deductive reasoning," Bennett suggested, "but first, let's have a look at this infernal machine."

"No, you don't!" The chief jumped up angrily. "Nobody's going near that suitcase. Those are my orders. The room's locked and there's a sergeant at the door. Don't any of you go wheedling him or trying to climb in the windows. I'm not going to have any more dead ones around here."

"But, Schmitz," Bennett said, undisturbed, "you've got to find out what killed these men. You've got to find out about the suitcase."

"Wait till I've had some time to think. I haven't slept all night. Let that end of it go, boys, until we hear from the coroner. They'll probably know what killed them pretty soon. I've been after them all night, but they're having the devil of a time. They can't seem

to find any cause of death except something like heart failure."

"O.K., chief, but let us know when you hear anything."

As the reporters walked excitedly toward the press room, Bennett slipped away and out of the building. He hurried to Paddy's saloon. In the back room, foul with smoke and the smell of whiskey, the pinochle game which the chief had prescribed for his worried men as an anodyne to their fears of death, was still in progress. Three policemen, in shirt sleeves, were sitting at a round table with Markhoff, one of the professional bondsmen well known to all, and were engrossed in their game. The fourth policeman, Sergeant Marty Grimes, was asleep on a bench. The door slammed behind Bennett and Grimes awoke with a start. Bennett nodded to the others and walked over to the man on the bench.

"Sorry, Marty," he said. "I didn't mean to wake you up. Have a shot?"

Grimes licked his dry lips and looked up at the reporter with bleared eyes.

"Whew!" he said. "Another one? O.K. What time is it?"

"A little after seven," Bennett told him and signalled to Paddy, who was leaning on the bar, for a couple of shots.

The big policeman sat up on the bench. His red face was shiny and moist and his shirt was badly crumpled. One shock of his hair was standing straight on end where he had lain on it. Al's quick, appraising first glance had convinced him that here was a perfectly healthy man, just slightly overloaded with whiskey and suffering chiefly from the effects of sleeping in a stuffy room.

"There's no need for you to worry, Marty," Bennett said convincingly as Paddy put a whiskey glass in the hand of each of them.

Grimes looked at him sheepishly, but was obviously relieved at his words.

"I'm not worried," he said, "but you should have seen them last night. They dropped like flies. And then some mother's fool suggests that it was that little machine in the suitcase that did it. When I heard that, I remembered that I'd been fiddling with the thing and I like to died right there myself. My heart started galloping up around my ears, I broke

out into a sweat all over, and my hands got cold as ice."

"Simply a disturbance of the vaso-motor system," Al said.

"What's that?" The policeman looked belligerent. Al's statement sounded a little like kidding because it had some words in it that he did not understand.

Al waved his glass with a cheery and apologetic gesture.

"I mean those symptoms were automatic because you were suddenly afraid for yourself," he explained. "We all have them when we get in a tight spot."

"I wasn't afraid," Grimes declared sharply. "I've many times——"

Al interrupted.

"I know," he said, "if some guy had you covered, you wouldn't have felt that way at all. You'd have been sore and figuring out some way to get him. But this other thing was something you didn't understand. None of us understand it. It's mysterious and it was new to you, so you felt that funny way."

"Yeah," Grimes agreed. "I guess that's it."

I didn't understand when they talked about the suitcase thing killing the others. It didn't sound real."

"What was this suitcase thing like?" Al asked.

"Well, it looked like a little motion-picture projector all screwed down to a sort of affair, and there were some wires and thingamajigs around. It looked like a demonstrator case for some fellow who was selling these things."

"Anything else?" Al asked.

"Well, the whole suitcase was lined with an inch of a bluish metal of some kind like I don't know. It wasn't heavy, though. Some of the boys started fiddling with it and pressing buttons and there was a little hum, but nothing happened."

"That's sure queer," Al said quietly, "but listen, Marty, I want to ask you some questions about what went on. You don't care, do you? It might help us find out what killed the boys."

"No. Shoot the works."

"Another shot?"

The policeman nodded and Al signalled for two more bracers.

"Listen, Marty," he began, "I want you to think hard and see whether these fellows who died did anything that you four here didn't do. You're all O.K. and obviously you're not affected——"

Marty grinned with pleasure.

Al went on. "Therefore, there must be something that they all did and that you didn't do that made them die and you be all right. That is, if the suitcase had anything to do with it."

"That sounds right," said the policeman, and he knitted his brows. "I can't think of anything, though. We all sort of fiddled with it and looked it over."

"Were you all in the room at the same time?"

"No, we were in and out. Moriarty opened it first and he called some of the others to look. Most of the time there were a bunch of us in there."

"Did you touch the machine?"

"Sure. But I just turned some little button or gadget."

"What did most of the fellows do?"

"Well, somebody said it looked like one of

those things they call an electric eye—some photo-cell business.”

“Yes. What did they do about it?”

“They passed their hand in front of the lens of the projector thing, but nothing happened.”

“Did you?”

“No. I couldn’t understand it and I didn’t bother.”

Grimes suddenly put down his whiskey glass with a bang. A startled look came into his eyes.

“What is it, Marty?”

“Three of the fellows were standing there waving their hands back and forth.”

“Yeah?”

“All three of them are gone. Oh, yes, and then Murphy came out to me later and started to tell me about what an electric eye was, and how he had put his hand in front of the thing, but nothing happened, so he guessed it was just some kind of a strange movie outfit. And then——”

The policeman looked desolately at his empty glass and Al hastily summoned another drink—for one this time.

"And then, what?"

"Then, damn it, he got white around the gills and his eyes got smoky and sort of afraid. He started to wobble. I said, 'What's the matter, Dennis, are you sick?' and he passed out. He was dead fifteen minutes later."

"That's four," Bennett urged. "How about the other one?"

"I don't know about him." Grimes was excited now. He shouted to the group at the table. "Hey, did any of you fellows wave your hand in that suitcase trying out that electric eye business?" he asked.

They all looked up from their cards. Each thought for a moment, then answered in the negative.

"That proves it!" Grimes said, grasping Bennett's arm.

"Almost," said Bennett, rising quickly. "Looks like an idea anyway, and it looks as if you certainly didn't have to worry now. Thanks, Marty. So long."

Bennett hurried out of the saloon.

"On the cuff, Paddy," he said as he passed the bar. Paddy smiled and pencilled up the drinks on a pad beside the cash register.

Bennett felt sure he was on the track of something, but he was not ready to reveal his theory yet to anyone but Schmitz. He hurried to the press room to telephone to the rewrite desk the smattering of new facts that had been gleaned by the boys in this early hour.

"Anything new?" he asked as he entered the press room.

"Yeah," said Talbot, the only one there. "The chief of police has just ordered the suitcase dropped into the bottom of the lake at nine o'clock this morning. He says he isn't going to risk any more deaths. Schmitz is all upset. He wants to keep it and see if some expert can't find out what it's all about. He's got a personal grudge against that suitcase."

"I don't blame him," said Bennett, "but they mustn't drop that suitcase in the lake. That's so darned unscientific."

He jerked up the 'phone and asked for the city desk. The ten minutes he spent talking to the rewrite man seemed interminable. Finally, he was through and he rushed to the chief's office. Schmitz seemed about to burst with fury.

"Listen, Schmitz, he began, "we can't let

them destroy that thing. I've got some real dope for you."

He sat down beside his friend and began to tell him of his conversation with Grimes.

CHAPTER VI

AN APPEAL TO THE NATION

"WELL," said the chief, when Al had finished telling of his conversation with Grimes, "you've at least got me convinced that this is a fiendish contraption, and a work of the devil, but I already knew that. What of all this you've learned? It's just a theory on what might have killed them all, but it doesn't tell exactly how, or why, or especially who's responsible for letting a thing like that lie around loose."

"No, but see here," Al protested, "I don't want this to go down as an unsolved mystery and that's what will happen if you let the big shot have the suitcase thrown in the lake. That will be two unsolved ones in a row. First, a professor gets shot from nowhere in front of ten thousand people and you don't know who did it. Now, five of your best men die and you don't even know what killed them. Talk about black eyes for Chicago! The pro-

fessor shooting is nothing compared to this. And the two of them together!"

"Well, what will I do? I'm no magician, and I'm not going to monkey with that thing and get killed myself."

"Ask the chief to give you some time so you can call on the world of science and find out about this device. Tell him your honor is at stake and you want to avenge the deaths of your men. He can't very well refuse then. You've certainly got some rights in this thing. It's the reputation of the detective bureau that's affected—and it's your men that are dead. You get the chief to lay off the suitcase and I'll get all the boys to have their papers print on the front page in big type a notice to all scientists, or anybody who has a theory, to explain the mystery. When you've got that straightened out, then maybe you can find out who owned the thing and begin to get somewhere."

"You're right," the chief agreed. "I think I can stop this business. Damn foolishness, anyway, dropping it in the lake like an old cat you didn't want any more."

He picked up the telephone. The conversa-

tion which ensued was a strange one, considering that the chief of detectives and his superior were ordinarily on good terms. As he talked, the red mounted in Schmitz's face and he was finally yelling and cursing at his chief. Then he spluttered, calmed down, pleaded. Again, he cursed and fumed. At last he said, "All right, I'll guarantee that," and he turned from the 'phone triumphantly. Bennett's eyes asked the question.

"I got twenty-four hours," the chief said. "If we don't know anything more by nine o'clock tomorrow morning, the boss is going to have his fun and give the suitcase a bath."

"That ought to be long enough," Bennett said. "I'll get the dope ready for the boys on the appeal to the world."

"Thataboy," said the chief, "and make it hot and heavy."

Bennett rushed to the press room and explained to his confrères that Chief Schmitzendorf wanted an appeal broadcast for someone to discover the mysterious death-dealing power of the strange machine. Each reporter readily visualized how his particular sheet would display the appeal and willingly tele-

phoned his city desk giving as detailed a description as possible of the mechanism and urging the world of science to solve the mystery.

Bennett spent a busy day. With two big stories on his beat he had more than plenty to do. The desk was crying for more and more to write about, regardless of how little was happening on either case.

The harassed reporters held a hasty conference and decided on a few wild and supposititious theories for each crime, which they quickly got some of their police friends to sponsor, and that satisfied the city desks for a while and gave them a breathing space for the actual events which were taking place.

At 10 A.M. one small piece of information developed. The sergeant who was watching at the bedside of the taxi-driver at the hospital telephoned to report that when the driver had recovered consciousness she said he had picked up his fare at the Union Station and had been ordered to drive to the Randolph Street station of the I.C. That was all the information he could give.

The chief immediately sent two men to the Union Station, where after an hour of questioning red-caps and baggage-room attendants, they finally learned that the brown suitcase had been called for at the baggage room, having been checked through from somewhere. The attendant remembered passing out such a suitcase, but could give little further information. The system was such that once the check stub had been turned in, proving ownership of the bag, there was no further record. He did remember that there was a one-day storage fee paid on the bag, but that was all.

The detective bureau was now swarming with reporters sent to assist the beat men and write up special angles of the death mystery. They had very slim pickings since the chief of detectives would not unlock the room where the suitcase was stored and photographers had to be content with snapping the sergeant on guard at the door and reporters were forced to call on their fertile imaginations or write subtly of the tense air of excitement which hung over the building, while others interviewed any policeman they could corner and

got the proper "sob" stories about "he was my pal and now he's dead."

As far as actual facts were concerned, the only new angle in the story of the professor's murder was the suspicion cast on the good-looking Almanian aviator. The morning papers had carried the story that a search of his room and his locker at the hangar had failed to produce any weapon except the one which he had admitted carrying and which obviously could not have been used to kill the professor. The afternoon papers, by an innuendo carefully worded so as to keep on the right side of the libel laws, were hanging on to this thin thread of news and intimating that the aviator was not yet cleared of suspicion. As a matter of fact, the police had not held him.

"He's being 'tailed,' though," Bennett told his city editor. "And they've got a bunch of letters over here which they took from his rooms. They're all in Almanian and they're going to get them translated."

On his rounds a few minutes later, Bennett walked into Lieutenant Sojak's office. He had a pile of letters spread out before him and he

looked up with a wry smile as the reporter entered.

"I can read six languages, but this has got me stumped," he said. "We've called the Almanian consulate and they're sending a girl down to read the letters."

"Let's have a look at them," said Bennett. "I'm somewhat of a linguist myself—pig Latin, alfalfa language, and that sort of thing."

He thumbed through the sheaf of correspondence. Suddenly he held up one letter with a little cry of astonishment.

"What do you think of this, professor?" he asked and pointed to one sentence.

It looked like "Arsikova dner tia Doctis Arturo del Grafko, at j esperg ti wogh yo iden."

"Well, I missed that," said the lieutenant. "I'm going to get that girl down here right away. They're damn slow at the consulate." He turned to the 'phone.

"And I'll just tip off the boss to the little discovery," Bennett said and left the room before he could hear whether the lieutenant wished this done or not.

Meanwhile, in a North Clark Street undertaking establishment, following a brief coroner's inquest which was continued indefinitely, a sorrowing crowd of Almanians had gathered for a brief memorial service over the remains of the professor and, in accordance with cabled instructions received from the family, the body was shipped at noon to catch the *Rex* bound for Genoa. Mr. Renzi, the vice-consul, accompanied it to the ship.

Bennett came back from lunch to discover that the coroner's physicians who had performed post-mortems on the bodies of the dead policemen had reported that all appeared to have practically no red corpuscles left in their blood and that this was the only, although certainly sufficient, cause of death. The boys in the press room had already talked with the doctors and had found them all puzzled by the case. The symptoms were those of pernicious anemia, but the mode of death was far different and the attacks had all been so sudden and the deaths so simultaneous that the doctors could give no explanation at all.

Bennett had plenty of time to make the next

deadline, but he 'phoned the story in immediately to give the desk time to call up leading medical authorities of the city for a symposium on their theories of the strange case.

At three in the afternoon something happened which gave Bennett a real "kick." Talbot came rushing in to say that a volunteer had arrived to solve the mystery of the death suitcase. The boys dashed for the chief's office in a body.

"This is Mr. Frederick Turner, a radio expert," the chief said. "He has volunteered to tackle the job of trying to solve the mystery of what killed the brave members of our force. I have warned him of the gravity of his task, but he says he believes he knows how to protect himself and I feel that if he wishes to undertake this civic responsibility, we should allow him to do so."

Mr. Turner waved a deprecating hand. "There will be no danger for me," he said.

"How did you happen to volunteer for this, Mr. Turner?" Talbot asked.

"I saw the appeal in the paper," Turner answered.

"What paper?" queried Bennett.

"The *Journal*."

Bennett gleamed triumphantly at his brother reporters.

"Naturally, nobody will be allowed in the room with Mr. Turner," the chief said. "He feels confident that his scientific knowledge will protect him, but I cannot take the responsibility of subjecting anyone else to the potential dangers involved in this experiment. We will inform all reporters as soon as Mr. Turner has finished his work."

The reporters trooped out of the room and hurried to telephones.

"Tell my desk to shoot that photog back here for a picture, will you? I'll be along in a minute," Bennett called after them. He remained in the room with the chief and the brave volunteer.

"Don't you think I'd better tell Mr. Turner what Grimes told me?" he asked the chief.

"Fine. Tell him all you can. I haven't seen the thing myself and I can't explain it, but you've heard a good first-hand description and you ought to be able to give him whatever

preliminary information he can possibly have."

"I hope you don't mind, Mr. Turner," Bennett began, "my telling you what I know about this. I got it from one of the policemen who handled the bag last night and who escaped death. I don't know about the scientific end of it, but I think I can give you a tip or two."

"Go right ahead."

Bennett described thoroughly his conversation with the policeman early that morning. At the mention of the electric eye the radio man nodded. He knew about such things, he said. Al went on.

"The point is," he said, "that it looks as if only those fellows who stuck their hands down in front of that lens had died."

"Thanks very much," said Turner, apparently not convinced. "I'll work behind the lens."

Al left to telephone the desk and, when he got to the press room, found an anti-climax awaiting him. The boys were snickering a little.

"Tell me after I 'phone this in about

Turner," Bennett snapped. He was ten minutes behind the others because he had stayed to warn the radio man. When he was finished he swung around and faced the group.

"Well?"

"You're the guy who found the professor's name in the letters, aren't you?" Donovan asked him.

"Yeah. What of it?"

"Well, they were translated a while ago and it's not exactly what you'd call a tough rap on the aviator."

"What did the letter say?"

"It was from his mother," Donovan said. "She said she was so proud to hear about the professor and the fame he was bringing to Almania and she hoped her darling boy would some day bring the same fame."

"Nuts," said Bennett, and he turned angrily to the 'phone, glad that for some reason, probably because he had been too busy, he hadn't informed the desk that it was he who found the professor's name in the letters.

The time dragged from then on. The reporters went back to the door behind which

the radio expert was working. There was a deathly silence, punctuated by a few weak efforts here and there at a funny remark. Something like a death watch, Al thought. The photographers were nearby, waiting to take the picture of the brave citizen.

At four-thirty the door opened and Turner walked out smiling. The reporters crowded around him.

"What did you find out?" they begged. Flash bulbs brightened the room.

"Well," said Turner, "I don't know why it kills people. I don't believe it did. It is a very simple device, as I know from having taken it apart. I didn't go into all the wiring, but as far as I could see . . . well, these terms are highly technical."

He coughed.

"Make it as plain as possible," the reporters urged.

Turner began to speak again. His eyes suddenly moved from one side of the room to another. He looked at Bennett quickly and the reporter's heart froze as he saw abject fear in the eyes.

"Say, Mr. Turner," he began, advancing toward the man.

But Turner fell to the floor before Al reached him. The chief was at his side in a moment. He picked up the man by the shoulders and rested his head on his knee.

The room was quiet as death as the chief reached for the pulse. Sixty seconds clicked by.

The chief looked up and nodded his head.

"Yes," he said slowly. "Dead."

CHAPTER VII

SIX OLD-FASHIONEDS

TEN minutes after Turner's death, the chief of police had the detective chief on the wire.

"Enough is enough, Schmitz," he shouted. "For God's sake, lay off the suitcase and let's get rid of it like I should have done this morning."

"My twenty-four hours isn't up yet," the detective chief said grimly, but with a dull despair in his voice.

"I suppose you want to go on fooling with that suitcase until you kill off a few more people?" The police chief's voice sizzled and crackled over the wires.

"It's our duty to learn what killed these men," Schmitz insisted.

"That's the coroner's job," was the retort. "You stay on your own beat. Are you ready to have that suitcase destroyed now?"

"My twenty-four hours aren't up."

"All right. All right. But if you kill anybody else off you're through as chief of detectives tomorrow morning. And I don't mean a transfer either. You're out. The first thing you know you'll find yourself indicted for murder, and that would be a nice picture for the detective bureau."

"I didn't start this thing," the detective protested. "I'm trying to finish it."

"You're finishing it too well to suit me," his chief replied. "That suitcase goes into the lake tomorrow morning and you'd better watch your step tonight."

A quarter of an hour later Bennett dropped in on his friend before leaving for his office. He had been ordered in to write a first-hand description of the death of Turner.

"The boss is stronger than ever for the burial at sea tomorrow," Schmitz said disconsolately.

"Don't let him," Bennett urged.

"Don't let him?" the detective chief snorted. "Don't let him! You should have been talking to him on the 'phone just now. After all, what's the good of it all, this trying to find out things about a machine that has a fiendish

will of its own? This fellow Turner. We'll never find out what he discovered. He didn't spill the dope in time."

"He certainly told us one thing," Bennett suggested.

"What's that?"

"It was the suitcase, all right, and no rare coincidence."

"I knew that all the time."

"You didn't know it, but now you do."

"I'll say I do. I wish I didn't. I mean I don't like the idea of that fellow dying right here in the building. That's not so hot for me."

"Don't worry about that, Schmitz. The boys will see to it that you don't get the rap. You warned this fellow and he was doing a good deed in trying to discover what killed the police."

"Yeah, but I've got a conscience, too."

"O.K. And it ought to feel all right, because you've done your best to clear things up."

"And made a mess of it."

"You did the logical thing."

"I suppose so. And I'm going home and go to bed. I've locked the room again and

there's nothing to do now but wait for the burial tomorrow unless somebody comes forward with a real explanation. They're not going to touch that suitcase, though, whatever they have to say."

"How will you get it out of here?"

"Oh, Mr. Turner must have put the thing back together again. We took a peek through the door and the suitcase is closed and standing on the table, as innocent-looking as anything."

"Well, it can't hurt anybody if it's closed up or else that guy in the taxi crash wouldn't have been carrying it around."

"You can't tell whether he wouldn't have kicked off soon if he hadn't been hit."

"That's a thought, but I don't think you're right. That fellow knew what was in the bag. It seems to fit into the picture pretty well that he had no labels in his clothes, and he had a lot of cash and a rod on him. I think he knew about it all right."

"I guess you're right, Al. Stick by me on this thing if I get in bad on account of Turner, will you?"

"You know me."

The two men shook hands and Al left the building in low spirits.

The *Journal* office was almost deserted when Bennett arrived. On the city desk were several late editions and he saw the fat black type "NEW MYSTERY DEATH" and glanced through the story which he had telephoned in an hour earlier. He didn't have much to add to the embellishments which the fast-working rewrite man had put on the death scene, but he sat down at a typewriter and prepared to write one of those "I was there" stories, since he had been told by the desk that the article was to appear under his "by-line."

He thought for a while and then began gingerly pushing the keys of the typewriter as he framed his lead paragraph. Bennett was one of the exponents of the hunt-and-peck method of typewriting. To him the touch system was merely a means of getting over a bad week-end when your friends had a little cash and you had none. He generally used the first finger of his right hand and the middle finger of his left, with now and then a little fillip by the right middle finger as he

got particularly confident. He could write with amazing speed, nevertheless, and when the fire of genius burned, as it did occasionally, he could make the typewriter hum in a fashion which would have been a credit to a regular reporter who wrote his stories every day. Inspiration was not with him tonight, however, and he tapped slowly in uneven rhythm as he sought for words which would graphically describe the scene and yet which would not arouse too much sympathy for Turner as a man, and thus produce a feeling of resentment on the part of the reader toward his friend, the chief of detectives. After all, Al remembered that he himself had suggested the appeal to the public which had caused Turner to volunteer his services. His mind kept dwelling on all the aspects of the queer case and his story developed slowly.

Soon something else happened to distract him. Helen Maynard, the girl reporter, walked in and sat down at a typewriter two desks away. She smiled at him as she passed and he nodded back absently. He had been so engrossed in his thoughts that his reactions had been slow and immediately

afterward he wished he had smiled too. He was disturbed to feel a tingling warmth creeping over his face and he hoped he was not blushing in his chagrin at having given her such a callous greeting. For he realized even before she had sat down that there was something about her that was strangely, and very, very pleasantly, distant from the many things which were harassing him. Just because she was a girl, perhaps. But she was a very attractive girl, too, and that made her seem even more distant from the things in his own life. Her teeth were white, glistening white, and her eyes were very dark and cool. They had always that look of reserve which seemed to say that she knew that she was a stranger in the world of men, she knew that women got no respect from reporters or editors, but that she respected herself and they could be damned, but she wouldn't say so—except with her eyes.

The story became harder and harder to write—especially as he was now embarrassed at the infrequent ticking of his keys, while from her typewriter came an even staccato which showed an ordered mind and a con-

fidant grasp of material. Al imagined that she was listening to his typewriter and he grew uncomfortably warm again. He suddenly wished he were like that girl—that is, had her view of life and way of living. She must find things pretty easy.

He wished he knew her better, so that they could go to a quiet place and talk. That would relieve his jangled nerves and make him forget those two unsolved mysteries which depressed him so that he could hardly write. He pounded on, obsessed now with the idea of finishing his story when she did. Maybe they might walk out of the office and they would suddenly find themselves somewhere together without his having to ask her. He cursed inwardly when she pulled a sheet of paper from her typewriter and began making pencilled corrections with a finality which showed him that she had finished. She got up and walked to the desk, where she dropped her story before Felz, the late man.

She walked past him toward the door. Bennett almost didn't look up at all, but then he summoned his courage and raised his head. She smiled at him again, a polite, impersonal,

chaste and univital smile—but devastating. He smiled back, this time too broadly. He felt a tired confusion and disappointment in his weary brain—a great disappointment that the scene he had pictured for this evening could not be. He should have risen and asked her if she wouldn't dine with him, but she was already at the door.

"Nuts," he said suddenly, "I might as well have a really good reason for calling myself an ass."

He got up and strolled casually toward the door in case one of those nasty little copy boys should have suspected what had been going on in his mind and could guess why he had left his typewriter. It wouldn't do to have any of the boys in the office know that he had suddenly got "soft" about a pretty girl reporter.

Once in the hall he dashed recklessly to the elevators where she was standing.

When he got to her side, he wished he were back at his typewriter.

"Say, Miss Maynard," he began. She turned toward him, surprise in her eyes. The elevator door flew open.

"Down," shouted the operator.

Bennett glared at him and the man slammed the door with a little extra push to show his contempt for people who pushed buttons and then wouldn't ride.

"I was thinking in there that if you didn't have anything to do tonight, it would be sort of nice to have dinner together. I know you don't know me very well."

She made it very easy for him.

"I think I know you fairly well," she said. "After all, we stand at the same window for our pay-checks, and that ought to mean something."

"Then you will go to dinner?"

"I think it would be fun if you really want to."

"Sure I do. Only I've got a couple of paragraphs more on my story before I go. Do you mind waiting?"

"I'll meet you down in the lobby in ten minutes," she said.

What a girl! Al felt dizzy with admiration. No copy boy need ever know that he had taken one of the office girls out. She certainly knew what was what, and she did it all so easily and naturally, too.

Al hurried his story to a slipshod completion, speedily read copy on it and shouted for a copy boy to carry it to the desk. Having at last completed his task and facing an evening which gave every prospect of being an extremely pleasant one, he hurried to his locker for his shaving things and rapidly managed a three-minute shave in the men's washroom. As he was putting his things back in his locker he noticed a pint bottle. It still contained one drink. But not for long. He felt like a million dollars as he stepped into the lobby.

"Let's pretend you're a little girl from Iowa," he began beamingly as he walked up to the girl who was waiting for him.

"But I am from Iowa!" she protested with arched eyebrows but a forgiving smile.

"Well, let's pretend that you've just come from there and I am going to show you the Century of Progress Exposition—Chicago's challenge to the world and to economic, shall we say, depressions."

"I think that would add considerably to my Iowa background," the girl responded.

"But first I must show you Ardito's place in a fine old Prairie Avenue mansion. You

can see there, in little glasses, where Iowa's tall corn goes when it gets to the wicked city."

"A beautiful thought."

They caught a taxi in front of the building and soon were speeding down Michigan Avenue. At Eighteenth Street they turned and for a moment caught a glimpse of the beautiful and fantastic Fair grounds, the buildings with their brightly colored towers glistening in a golden late afternoon sunshine.

The taxi drew up before a dilapidated but still fine old brownstone residence. As they stood before the huge door of the house, they could see themselves in a large mirror set into the heavy oak, but suddenly a face appeared in this glass which a moment before had seemed to be mirror. Al was instantly recognized and the door swung open. Ardito smiled and bowed.

"No," Al said, as the proprietor started to usher them to the dining room. "Just a little table in the corner of the bar. We're invited out to dinner and we can only stay for a few drinks."

"I don't want to hurt his feelings," he

whispered to the girl as Ardito ceremoniously led the way to the bar. "The food is good, but I want to eat in the Fair grounds tonight."

They sat down and Al suggested Martinis.

"They are not made from corn," the girl smiled. "You know I am a strong advocate of the 'Buy Iowa' policy."

Al grinned. "Old-fashioneds, then? They don't make them with rye out here because you can't get good rye. But they're all right."

"Fine."

When the waiter had gone to order the drinks, Al asked, "Have you ever been in New York, Miss Iowa?"

"No. I never have."

"Gee, that's a marvelous town. It has it all over Chicago for speaks. On some of the streets there nearly every house is a speakeasy, and a good one too. The few people who still live on those streets are bothered so much by people ringing doorbells that they live a miserable life and usually get to the insane asylums before the clients of the drink dispensaries. I saw one house once that had a sign in the window, 'private residence,' so people wouldn't bother to ring the bell."

"It sounds wonderful."

"It is. And what's more, you can get marvelous food and good drinks in the same place. Wine, liqueurs, everything. In Chicago if the liquor is good, the food is terrible, or they only serve steak sandwiches. If the food is good, you can't get anything but bad wine."

By the time Al had finished his sixth old-fashioned and Helen her fourth, he felt that they were very well acquainted indeed.

"You wouldn't think," she suggested, "that possibly you might be taking too many of those?"

"I never thought of that," Al said. "My nerves are all upset and I always drink a lot when I'm working hard. It keeps me going. But I'm sorry. I forgot that you might want to eat. Let's be on our way. I hope I haven't bored you."

"Not at all, but dinner isn't a bad idea."

They went out into the quiet dusk. Already giant shafts of light from the Fair grounds were sweeping the darkening sky.

"I've been terribly interested in all you

had to say," the girl confessed when they were in the taxi.

"I suppose I talked too much."

"Not at all. Your life is so much more interesting than mine. You never have to cover women's clubs."

"No, thank God!"

As a matter of fact, Helen now knew just as much about the two stories which were engrossing Al's attention as he did himself. She had listened breathlessly to his stories and his theories about why the professor was slain, what was in the suitcase, what possibilities there were of solving either mystery.

Her obvious interest in his recital didn't serve to minimize the effect of the old-fashioned on Al's wearied brain. As they ate their dinner at the Old Heidelberg Café, sitting on the terrace above the magnificent panorama of the Fair grounds, he became really confidential.

"I'm not going to let the chief of police dump that suitcase story in the lake," he said solemnly. "It's too good for that."

"What do you mean?" the girl asked, with apprehension in her tone.

"I'm going to steal that suitcase tonight after I leave you and the *Journal* is going to solve the secret. It will be that scoop of the century you've heard about so often."

"Oh, Al—Mr. Bennett—don't do anything foolish! Don't lose your sense of proportion."

Al's brain was afire with the alcohol he had consumed.

"I can get that suitcase," he said confidently.

"I don't mean that. I know you can. But think of the risks, and think of the trouble you'll get into. You don't dare do a thing like that. And you mustn't. And—I don't want you to."

He looked at her sharply. "Well, I've made up my mind."

Strange, how that delightful feeling of *rapport* can so suddenly vanish. The excited conversation of the earlier part of the evening was over. Al again felt embarrassed at being with this girl. Their conversation lagged horribly. "I suppose you're tired. We ought to be going," he finally suggested, not understanding even himself why his voice seemed so uncordial.

"I suppose I should," she answered, and he realized that she understood, better than he, what the present situation was.

But he had cast the die, and the drinks had not worn off. They went to her home in a taxi and he escorted her to the door. Dazed, he felt the pressure of her fingers on his arm.

"Please don't do that foolish thing," she pleaded softly.

"I'll think about it," he answered, looking away.

She bit her lip and turned from him.

"It was awfully nice of you to ask me to dinner," she said. "I enjoyed it."

"Thanks for coming," he answered.

Sick with anger at himself, he walked back to the cab.

"Stop at Chestnut and Rush," he told the driver.

CHAPTER VIII

A STRANGE SHIPMENT

WITH a pint on his left hip and another in his inside coat pocket, Al rode to the central police station. Inside he went directly to where Kersig was on guard outside the door of the room where the mysterious suitcase rested.

"Hello, Al!" Kersig greeted him. "What are you doing around here this time of night?"

"I've been out on a date, Tom. One of those gals that gets you a little upset. I didn't feel like going home, so I came down here to see what's going on. Suitcase still safe, I suppose?"

"Nobody wants to go near the thing," Kersig answered. "There's hardly been a blessed soul in here all night except the *Tribune* and *Examiner*, just wanting to see if I was playing nursemaid all right."

"I'd like to see anybody get in that room with you here, Tom," Bennett said.

"Yeah, let 'em try."

The reporter ostentatiously took a pint bottle from his coat pocket and laboriously unwrapped it. He pulled the little metal strap away from the protecting cover with his teeth and finally extracted the cork. Putting his nose to the mouth of the bottle, he sniffed appraisingly and appeared highly satisfied.

"You wouldn't like a drink, would you, Tom?"

The sergeant looked nervously around the room.

"Well, now, Al. I'm guarding this place under strict orders."

"One shot?"

"Just a small one, then, Al, but let's make it snappy."

Al went to the door and looked down the corridor. He smiled significantly at Kersig and walked back to him, holding out the bottle. The sergeant took it and raised it to his lips.

"Not bad, eh?" Al asked proudly.

"The McCoy," the sergeant answered. "Have one yourself." Al took a sparing gulp.

"This suitcase business is certainly the most

mysterious thing we've had down here for a long time, isn't it, Tom?"

"Most mysterious we'll ever have."

"Did you see any of the boys kick off?"

"No, thank God. I was off duty."

Both were silent for a moment.

"Have another little one, Tom."

"Well, stand in front of me in case somebody comes in the door."

"O.K."

Tom took another long one. Al put the bottle back in his pocket.

"Aren't you going to have one?" Tom asked solicitously.

"Not right now. I've been hitting it up already."

Tom grinned. "That goes to the spot. This is a bad job, sitting here all night."

"I'll say so. Take another little nip and you'll like your job."

"Well. One little one. Those others just warmed me a bit."

The big sergeant took another swig.

"Now it's your turn, Al."

"No, thanks."

"Hey, what kind of a party is this? I'm

not drinking another man's liquor and him not drinking at all. Take a drop of that, boy, or I'll think you're not Al Bennett, but somebody else sitting here."

"All right, Tom."

Al put the bottle to his lips and drank.

"You know," Tom said, "I don't mind this job so much. I was sitting here dozing when you came in. Now you're here and I've got a drink or two in me and the first thing you know, it will be morning."

They talked. Tom had not been present in the afternoon when the radio expert had died and Al gave him a full account of the affair.

"And that calls for another drink, Tom."

"It does."

The bottle was now sitting on a small table nearby. Al no longer bothered to conceal it between drinks, and Tom didn't seem to care.

"But one for you, too, my boy."

"I don't need another one."

"But you're having one for a friend."

Al drank.

"Say, Tom, let's have a look at the suitcase. I don't mean open it up, but I'd just like to have a look at the outside."

"I've got orders, Al. I'd like to let you do anything you want to. You know that. But I've got orders."

"It wouldn't hurt just to look at the thing. I'm interested."

"So am I, but I'm not touching it nor letting you look at it." Tom reached for the bottle and raised it to his lips.

"Go ahead. Help yourself," Al said, in answer to his unspoken apology.

"And you." Al took the proffered bottle and swallowed another gulp.

Then he got up and strode toward the door. His hand was on the knob.

"I'm just going to take a look," he said.

Tom was on his feet like a tiger. He sprang to the side of the reporter and brushed his hand from the doorknob.

"No, you don't!" he shouted angrily. "Didn't I tell you I've got my orders?"

"Go easy, Tom."

"Never mind that stuff. Sit down and behave like a gentleman. You can't slip by me like that just because I've had a few drinks out of your bottle. Take the damn thing and be off with you."

"Oh, don't be sore, Tom. I'm just curious. And you know my liquor's yours, regardless of what goes on. Have another."

They drank a toast to forget their quarrel and Al sat down again, determined on a siege rather than a sortie.

At midnight he opened his second bottle. Tom was very red-faced by now and he was telling Al just what he would do if he were chief of police.

The next morning Al was awakened by someone's shaking his shoulder. He looked up into the face of Sergeant Sloan.

"It's time to get up, Al."

"Where's Kersig?"

"He went home an hour ago, singing like a lark."

"Where's the suitcase?"

"Behind the door where it always was. I'm guarding it now until the big boy comes to drop it into the lake. What's the matter, boy? Did you have a big night?"

Al rubbed his eyes, ran his hands through his rumpled hair, looked down at his recumbent form stretched along a bench, and

wondered if it really belonged to him. He thought of Helen, but the thought was painful and he immediately dismissed it from his mind. Then of Kersig. That dirty rat. He had drunk him down. He! Al Bennett, the drinker, the schemer. Damnation!

"I wonder if he knew what I was after," Al mused. "No, of course not. He probably thinks I just felt like a good Samaritan and wanted to cheer up his lonely hours. It wasn't such a hot idea after all. And I can tell her that I took her advice and thought better of it."

Al looked over at the sergeant who had returned to his chair by the door and who was grinning at him.

"What time is it?" he asked him.

"Six-thirty."

"I've got to get going." He rose unsteadily and straightened his tie.

"Don't tell Schmitz where I slept last night," he said to Sloan as he left the room. Sloan grinned again.

"I've opened the window wide," he said. "He'll never know you were here."

Al was too fagged to retort.

Al's head soon cleared, but still he was relieved that there was little early morning crime to report. The main interest was in the disposition of the suitcase. At eight-thirty, in the hallway, Al met the chief of detectives just coming in.

"Have you had any ideas?" the reporter asked.

"Not a one. Have you?"

"I had one," Al answered, with a mysterious smile, "but it wasn't a very good one."

"You look all shot, Al."

"I've been worrying. You don't look so hot yourself. Let's forget this suitcase business and get down to work on the professor. I've still got some theories on that affair."

"You're right."

Promptly at nine o'clock the chief of police appeared with a picked squad of men. He was going to see to it personally that his orders were carried out. He went to Schmitzendorf's office.

"Well, your twenty-four hours are up now," the chief of police said.

The detective chief's face was expression-

less. "Yep. Go ahead and take the thing away. I'm not interested any more."

"You should have let me do this yesterday morning."

"Yeah. Yeah." Schmitz waved a weary hand indicating he was anxious to drop the conversation.

The chief of police and his men went to the room where Sloan was on guard.

"Unlock the door," he commanded. "Dennison and Tully will bring it out."

The two officers went into the room, one of them carrying a large blue cloth laundry bag. The chief stood at the open door.

"You hold the bag open beside the table and you, Tully, shove the suitcase off into it with a chair or something," he directed.

There was a thud as the suitcase dropped onto the floor inside the bag and the two men came rather sheepishly out of the door, dragging the bag behind them. Several of the reporters who were standing about shouted, by prearrangement, "Hooray, hooray, for our side!" The chief gave them a withering look. Flashlight bulbs glared.

The chief and his men sped to the river at Michigan Avenue, where a launch awaited them. Three speedboats, hired by newspapers and crowded with reporters and photographers, chugged nearby. Three policemen gingerly tossed the bag into the launch and stepped in beside it. The chief watched from the wharf, a serious dignified expression on his face that bespoke his pride in the dramatic way in which he was rendering this instrument of death entirely harmless forever.

"Be sure to go out a couple of miles beyond the crib," he shouted to his men.

They nodded. The exhaust on the launch began popping and the boat moved away from its mooring. The idling speedboats raced ahead.

Two hours later the water cavalcade returned. Eight miles out in the lake, weighted down with three hundred pounds of iron, the murderous suitcase lay on the bottom.

Down at the detective bureau, while this drama was going on, Bennett was attempting to console his friend, the chief of detectives.

"This suitcase business has taken your mind

off of something mighty important," he suggested. "We've really neglected the murder of the professor. Now that the suitcase is in the lake, the city editors are going to want to give a lot more space to the World's Fair murder, and we'd better hop to it and see that they have something real to write about."

"That's right," the chief admitted, with little interest in his voice.

"You know the best way to keep from having the blues is to have something to work on—hard," Bennett urged.

"I suppose so," Schmitz agreed. "But what the devil? This case is just as messy as the suitcase business. The aviator angle has blown up. I don't see how he could have been shot from the sky-ride. We don't even know the motive."

"Maybe we'll find a motive. If we only knew what his exhibit was or what he was going to tell the world at the Fair."

"No hope there," the chief answered. "The Fair authorities got a cable today from the laboratory saying that none of his associates or family knew the details of the invention, or even the professor's plans. They said he

alone knew the secret and that the Fair people might just as well give up the idea of having an exhibit."

"That's tough. But there must be some way we can find out about this thing and get at the motive behind the shooting. I'll bet somebody back in Almanian can tell us a thing or two. Did you get an answer to that cable you sent to the Almanian authorities?"

"Yeah. I got an answer this morning." The chief listlessly handed over a cablegram.

Bennett read:

Professor del Grafko universally loved
and respected stop Had no known enemies
stop No family financial or business troubles
stop Two attempts recently to break into
his laboratory unsuccessful and apparently
not intended against professor personally.

"That doesn't tell us much," Al said, "except, of course, about the attempts to break into the laboratory. Somebody wanted something in there—probably the professor's latest invention. I've got a hunch that this invention may have a lot to do with the whole thing."

"If they could only trace that shipment,"

the chief said. "Maybe the thing has been stolen in this country."

"I'm not so sure. I don't see why they would have shot the professor if they had the invention—or maybe they would, at that."

A sergeant came into the room and dropped a telegram on the chief's desk. As he commenced to read it, his relaxed face suddenly became tense.

"What is it?" Bennett asked eagerly. "Some news?"

The chief beckoned to him and Bennett leaned over his shoulder to read the telegram. It was from the New York city police department.

Professor del Grafko's shipment to World's Fair under assumed name Arthur Grafton located at Altoona Pennsylvania where held for improper crating stop However entire shipment consists only ten crates live guinea pigs stop advise disposal.

Al gave a low whistle of surprise.

"That gives me an idea," he said as he dashed from the room. "I'll be back when I've 'phoned the desk."

CHAPTER IX

BENNETT TURNS SURVEYOR

BENNETT came back to the chief's office that afternoon.

"I've asked the boss to send me a relief man over here to work my full shift every day," he said. "I'm going to turn detective and get to the bottom of this professor shooting. I'm going to start at the ground and work my way up until I can come dashing in here and tell you just who to arrest."

"Start at the ground?" the chief grunted sarcastically. "You'd better start in the air. That's where the bullet came from, and you'll have more luck if you find the source of the bullet."

"We're all up in the air. That's what's the matter," Bennett retorted. "You have to admit you didn't do your usual job on the professor because this suitcase business came along and got you all upset."

"Well, there wasn't much to work on."

"But you didn't work on what you had. I've got some ideas of my own and I'm going to work on them scientifically. And as long as I have a substitute on the beat, the boys can't kick if I get a scoop."

"Now wait, Al. Don't leave me out in the cold on this. If you've got some ideas, let me know, and I'll have the boys work on them."

"Those flatfoots! Nothing stirring. This is going to be real intellectual work and I'm going to be a lone wolf."

"Now Al—of course, I don't think you'll get anywhere—but you'd like to have my help anyway, wouldn't you?"

"Yeah? And spill the story to all the papers at once. Nothing doing. I got relief from the desk by giving them a song and dance that I thought I could get them a scoop, and I'm not going to let the pack in."

"Listen, Al. You know I've protected you always. Let's work together and, if you really turn up anything, your paper will get it first."

"That's a promise?"

"A promise."

"Well, all right. It would be a little help, after all, to have some of your strong-arm boys with me now and then."

"But what have you got to work on, Al?"

"Well, first of all, we know the motive."

"The motive? We know the motive?"

"Sure."

"But what——?"

"The professor was shot because somebody wanted his invention—a death-dealing device extremely useful, no doubt, in the warfare of the future."

"You mean the suitcase!"

"Exactly, my dear Watson! I didn't tumble until today. But now that is certain."

"How?"

"The telegram about the guinea pigs. What do you do with guinea pigs? You kill 'em for scientific purposes."

"But why did the professor ship them from New York?"

"Maybe he heard about the shortage of guinea pigs here. There is one, you know. There was a feature yarn about it in the papers the other day. Maybe he just wanted to be

sure to have them on hand. I don't know."

"But the assumed name?"

"Avoiding publicity. The old boy wasn't so dumb, and he didn't want a lot of funny stories printed about him. Also I suppose he didn't want any inkling of the nature of his invention to leak out ahead of time. At least, that's my theory."

The chief shook his head.

"No, Al," he said. "Your story won't hold up. Why would a man with an invention like that put it in a suitcase and check it on the train?"

"I can answer that one too, putting myself in the shoes of the dead professor. If somebody was after something valuable I had, the logical thing to do would be to treat it as if it were not valuable, but at the same time make sure that it was well taken care of. You know yourself that a suitcase checked on an American train is about ninety-nine per cent sure to reach its destination."

"Well, maybe so. But I don't think it was the professor's suitcase."

"It got in town the same day he did. We know that because there was a one-day storage

charge when the unknown guy who picked it up got it at the station."

"But if the suitcase belonged to the professor, and it was so darn important, why didn't he get it when he got off the train? All he would have had to do was to tell the welcoming committee that he wanted to get a suitcase he had checked and he would have then had it in his possession."

"That's one I can't answer, but maybe I'll be able to before I'm through. Anyway, it isn't so important. We don't need to know why he didn't make a bee-line for the baggage room and shout for his suitcase. Maybe he's one of those absent-minded professors you read about. Maybe he was so excited about the welcome that it slipped his mind. There's a lot of things more important than finding out just what went on in his mind or just what his plans were about the suitcase at that particular moment."

"Well, all I can say is I hope you know what you're doing, Al."

"Aw, look here, Schmitz. This is hot stuff. Come on and get excited. Look, we can assume that the suitcase belonged to the pro-

fessor. It was certainly something new and novel, to say the least. It came in on the same train he did. He was having guinea pigs sent here so he could show it off. He was afraid somebody would get it, and so he checked it. Remember that story about how he disappeared for twelve hours in New York? He said he was shopping. He probably was—for guinea pigs. But it looks to me as if he were keeping under cover, too. I'll bet when we get this thing unravelled, we'll find that the old boy had somebody hot on his trail all the time."

"Why did they kill him when they had his invention?"

"Wrong there. When they killed him, they didn't have his invention. That suitcase wasn't called for until the next day."

"That's right, but that makes it more mysterious than ever."

"Maybe they didn't want the invention, but just didn't want him to tell anybody about it. You know he is supposed to be the only one who knew its real secret."

"Well, Al. Parts of your theory sound plausible. I don't know, though."

"Say, I'm not sure enough myself to spill a word to anybody but you. I'm not going to tell my boss even, until I get farther along."

"What do you want to do? How are you going to go about solving the crime?"

"Well, first of all, I'm not going to start until tomorrow morning. Whoever killed this fellow must feel pretty safe if he can judge the progress of the police by reading the newspapers. There's no big hurry and I want a good night's sleep. I did a lot of—er—worrying last night, and I don't feel as spry in the brain as I should."

"Seems to me you've done pretty well with what brain you've got," said Schmitz grudgingly. In spite of himself he could not help but be impressed with Al's reasoning.

"Thanks! First of all, have you got the written report of the autopsy on the professor? Can I take it home with me tonight? O.K. And tomorrow morning, can you lend me a smart detective—I mean the smartest one you've got—who can keep his mouth shut. I don't want anybody yapping to the boys. Fred Olsen would do very nicely. He owes

me a thing or two and I think I can trust him."

"He'll be here tomorrow morning at any time you say."

"Make it nine-thirty. We amateur detectives have to have our sleep, doncher know."

"All right, Al, and good luck to you."

"Oh, and another thing. If I were you, I'd get a nice posed portrait of that fellow on the slab over at the morgue—the one who was in the taxicab. I'd broadcast it all over the country and ask for identification. I know you've found out that he's not a rogue's gallery man, but somebody might recognize the picture. Some of the papers here might print the picture too. A little gruesome, but in a good cause."

"Just as you say, chief," Schmitz saluted gravely.

"Cut it out, my dear Watson. Don't let this get under your skin and don't try to kid me out of this. I think I'm on the right track."

Al went back to his routine work in the press room, his mind full of the theory he had concocted on rather slender circumstantial evidence.

"What were you doing in the chief's office so long? Anything new?" the boys asked.

"Not a thing. I was just consoling him. He wants his suitcase back. He's a little nutty on the subject."

Al met Olsen in plain clothes at the station the next morning at the appointed hour.

"I've been detailed as your assistant," the huge detective grinned. "What's the big idea?"

"We're going to investigate the white slave traffic," Al whispered mysteriously.

"Nice assignment."

"We'll begin by visiting the World's Fair grounds."

"What?" The detective's jaw dropped.

"I was just kidding, Fred. We're really going to look more closely into the death of Professor del Grafko and we're naturally going to start at the point where he was shot. Come along."

They walked over to the Fair grounds despite the detective's protest at so much exercise, but Al was feeling jubilant and he

rejoiced in the opportunity to stretch his legs. Finally they reached the Hall of Science, entered and crossed to the area where the speaker's rostrum was located.

"What's this?" asked Al, as he noticed a workman on his knees on the floor of the rostrum, a bucket by his side and a small trowel in his hand.

"What are you doing there?" he asked when they reached the man's side.

The laborer looked up startled. He lowered his head to his work as if he had decided not to answer, then thought better of it.

"I'm just patching up this hole in the floor," he said.

Al looked down and saw the narrow trough where the bullet which killed the professor had been dug out of the floor.

"No, you don't," he said quickly.

"Who says I don't?" the laborer inquired sarcastically.

"I guess you'd better tell him who says so, Fred," said Al, and the detective pushed back his coat to reveal his badge.

"What's the big idea?" asked the workman.

"We're just investigating. Lay off this spot for about an hour," Al told him. "We'll fix it all right with your boss."

The workman put his bucket and trowel to one side and walked off to find his foreman.

"Now, then," Al began. "We're going to do a little surveying. I decided to come over here in the morning because there won't be many people around. Are you much of a surveyor, Fred?"

"I don't know anything about it."

"Fine. Neither do I. At least, we shall not be encumbered by outworn dogmas and inflexible creeds."

"What's that?"

"Never mind, Fred. Here's our tools." Al pulled a small ball of twine and a folding rule from his pocket.

"Well, of all things!" the detective said. "If the boys from the press room could see you now."

"Never mind, Fred. A word out of you and you go to Hegewisch. The chief promised to shoot you if you breathed a word of this, but I told him that a transfer to the sticks would be sufficient."

"Aye, aye, sir," said the detective. "Where do we begin our crocheting?"

"You knit your brows while I do a little measuring first," Al said. "I'll need you in a minute."

The reporter laid his rule along the floor and got roughly the dimensions of the platform, in shape somewhat like a whiskey flask. The broad platform jutting out from the elevated court of the Science Building formed the body of the flask, while the rostrum, with its curved front, elevated two steps above the general platform, formed the neck of the bottle. Around the entire platform and rostrum there was a low wall of masonry.

"I've got to make a little map," Al explained as he measured. He finally finished, and drew a rough outline of the stand, approximately in proportion. Then he turned to the policeman.

"You stand up there where the professor was standing," he directed.

"Any airplanes around?"

"Never mind. You won't get shot. Now I'm going to measure the distance from your

feet to the bullet hole. That gives us the base of the triangle."

"Is this one of those forbidden love shootings?"

"Not that kind of a triangle, Fred," Al answered, as he marked off the distance from the detective to the bullet hole. Nine feet to where the bullet came to rest.

"Now then," Al said. "If you don't mind being the vertical side of our right-angled triangle." He began unrolling the ball of string.

"Say, what's the big idea, Al?"

"I'd better explain. After all, I want your fullest co-operation."

"Oh, you'll get that, but——"

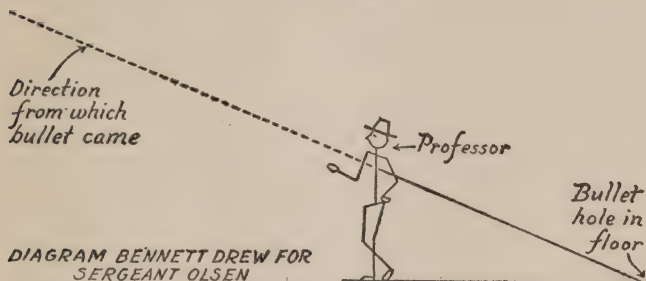
Al sketched a right-angled triangle on a sheet of paper and extended the hypotenuse.

"You see," he explained, "this lower right-hand corner is the spot where the bullet hit. The upper left-hand corner is your heart—I mean the professor's heart. The bullet had to come along that line I have drawn out beyond the triangle."

"I get it," said the detective. "Orders, sir."

"Well, the professor was five feet eight in

height. You're about six-one, aren't you? Well, hold this string about five inches below your heart, and stand over there where the professor was standing."



Al took the other end of the string and held it with his finger in the farther end of the groove made by the bullet. On his knees he squinted along the string.

"Move a little to the north," he requested. "That's fine. That keeps the sky-ride in. It's O.K. for an airplane and maybe it's O.K. for that north wing of the building. But it certainly rules out those towers of the electrical group across the pond. A bullet from there, if it ever got this far, would have gone through the body almost horizontally."

Al looked down at the string which he was holding in the groove. "Oh, oh!" he said with

a start. "I've got another idea. Step south now until I get this string running evenly along this groove."

The detective obeyed him. Al was looking intently at the groove. "A little farther."

"I can't go any farther without flying," the detective said.

"You what?" Al looked up. The detective was standing tight against the southern side of the low masonry wall about the rostrum.

"Good Lord!" Al exclaimed. "Take your hand away from your heart and stretch it out to the south until I tell you to stop."

The detective began slowly extending his arm.

"Hold everything," said Al. The string now ran neatly and directly along the bottom of the groove.

"This is getting hot," said Al with satisfaction.

"What did you find out?"

"I found out," Al replied, "that, allowing for certain minor inaccuracies in our surveying instruments, the professor was shot while standing suspended in mid-air, two feet to the south of the rostrum."

"I don't get it."

"You will. Wait a shake until I measure the length of this bullet groove, and then we must find the foreman of the building and tell him that he can't fill this hole up yet. We may need it in court."

CHAPTER X

AN ASTOUNDING TELEGRAM

"THIS looks pretty fishy to me," Olsen commented as he and Bennett walked toward the Roosevelt Road entrance to the Fair grounds, following their surveying expedition at the scene of the murder.

"It's fishy all right and I haven't figured out what it means, but it's something to work on," Bennett answered.

They left the entrance, already crowded with early morning sightseers.

"I'm going to take a bus back to Michigan and walk over to Central," the reporter told his companion. "You go in the Administration Building there and request the Fair authorities not to fill up that bullet hole in the floor of the rostrum. I don't want to go along because I want your request to be absolutely official and some of them in there know that I work for a newspaper. I don't

think you'll have any trouble at all, as they ought to want to co-operate. If you do have trouble, call Schmitz right away and make your request absolutely official. They'll certainly have to comply then."

"What'll I say if they ask why we want the hole left there?"

"Don't tell them a thing. Simply say it may be needed as evidence and it must be preserved as it is. Tell them to put a fence around it if they want to and charge the public a quarter to look at the bullet hole. That's a little promotion scheme that ought to please them."

Bennett took a bus to Eleventh Street and Michigan Avenue, where he left it and walked over to the detective bureau.

At the station he went immediately to the chief's office.

"You can't see him now," he was told. "He's busy."

"What's he doing?" the reporter asked.

"He's got Sig. Benefio, the Almanian consul in there," the sergeant told him. "I don't know what it's all about, but there's been some hot words coming through the door."

One of them, or both of them, are sore about something."

"Tell the boss I was here, will you?" Al said. "I'll be in the press room."

"What he had heard troubled him a great deal. Had his talk with Schmitz yesterday, trying to make him forget the tragedy of the suitcase and concentrate on the professor's slaying, made the chief become too active in the wrong direction? Bennett, despite his intense interest and purpose to solve the crime, did not really intend to work without the aid of the detective bureau and he had secretly hoped that Schmitzendorf would respect him enough to consult him about all phases of the investigation, although he knew this was a pretentious attitude for him to take.

"But Schmitz knows me well enough not to have to worry about his pride in front of me," he thought. "I can't understand why he should call this fellow in now. There's no reason to suspect him, God knows, except that he's an Almanian. If he has had anything to do with this, or if he knows anything about it, this is the surest way to make him duck. He could probably arrange to get

called home to Almanian at any moment, if he wanted to."

The reporter's worry was such that he was in no mood to be kidded when he arrived at the press room.

His fellow workers didn't spare him. "Here's the star reporter," they announced. "Here's the chief of police, I mean the mayor, I mean Sherlock Holmes. What's the big mystery, Al? Let us in on it."

"It's nothing at all, boys," Bennett announced calmly. "The reason the desk sent my good friend Jo Krueger over here to relieve me is that I am working on a big story which is really not on this beat. Our Federal Building man informs us that the United States Government is going to court martial the chief of police for dumping a death-dealing instrument in navigable waters under control of the War Department. In case Chicago declares war on the United States, you can see how serious a situation it would be. I am using the leisure hours granted me in taking a post-graduate course in how to be a war correspondent. I trust this clears up the situation."

"That settles it," said Donovan. "Two spades."

The boys resumed their bridge game, aware that whatever Bennett was doing, they would not find it out.

"Anything doing, Krueger?" Bennett asked the man who had been sent over to substitute for him.

"Nothing but a few filling station holdups."

"Anything on the professor mystery?"

"Schmitz said this morning that he was working on a new angle of the case and that we might expect important revelations at any moment."

"Oh. Did he give any hint of the nature of these possible revelations?"

"No, he was very mysterious. Just wanted to assure the newspapers that the police were hard at work on the case and that naturally it was in the interest of the public to conceal the nature of the investigation until the proper time, etcetera, etcetera."

"Thanks. Has the desk called for me?"

"Nope."

Bennett pulled up a chair facing the window and rested his feet on the sill. He looked

gloomily out. The elation of his discovery at the Fair grounds was dampened by his feeling that the chief was not working with him. Nevertheless, he turned over and over in his mind the possible significance of the fact that the track of the bullet did not coincide with the path it must have taken if it had passed through the body of the professor.

Krueger, who had left the room for a moment, returned and tapped Bennett on the shoulder. He indicated with his eyes that the reporter was to follow him. Out in the hall he explained.

"I just met a sergeant on the way from the chief's office," he said. "He told me to tip you off quietly that Schmitz could see you now."

"Thanks," said Bennett and he walked to the chief's office.

"What the hell?" he began as he entered. The chief looked startled.

"What's the matter? Why all the excitement?"

"What the big idea of calling the consul in for questioning? That isn't on the program

yet. You'll scare him to death and he won't be of any help to us when we get some real clues and need his information about conditions in Almania and that kind of thing. I don't consider it fair for you to——"

The chief held up his hand to stem the flow of Al's excited words.

"I didn't call him in."

"What do you mean? Was he paying a social call?"

"I wish it had been. It was very unsocial."

"Was he sore?"

"I'll say he was. And when those foreigners get excited they can certainly talk."

"What's he sore about?"

"Oh, just the whole idea of the murder. He claims that the police haven't done enough to solve the crime and bring the murderer to justice. He even showed me a cable he had from the King of Almania himself, asking the consul to urge the city authorities to take drastic steps to avenge the murder and expressing the king's deep regret that such a deplorable thing was allowed to happen to such an important and learned subject of Almania."

"Well, you're certainly coming up in the

world, having a king criticize you," comforted Al.

"Yeah, but I don't like it."

"Why didn't the consul go to the chief of police?"

"Well, he seemed to be a pretty good sport about that end of it. He told me he wasn't giving the press the cable from the king and he was coming to me because he knew I was directly in charge of the investigation. He said he wouldn't protest to the chief unless he really felt that I was not doing all I could, and he just wanted to impress me with what an important character the professor was."

"Well, that was white of him. Did you calm him down?"

"I hinted that we were getting somewhere. I was thinking about you. But, of course, I didn't tell him any of our theories—if we've got any! I did ask him again if he had any ideas about what the professor's invention was, but he said he didn't know. This whole thing has got me worried, though. It's going to be a big black eye for me if we don't get somewhere pretty soon."

"We'll get somewhere, all right."

The chief's face lighted up. "Did you find out anything this morning?" he asked eagerly.

"I think so, but I don't know just what it means," Al answered.

"Let's hear about it."

Al rapidly began to explain what he had done and what he had found out.

"First of all," he said, "I studied the coroner's report carefully. He found that the bullet passed directly through the heart at a downward angle of about thirty degrees. He also stated that the bullet had not hit any bones and had not been deflected. I wanted to get that straightened out first of all, and I called the doc up last night and talked to him over the 'phone to make sure that all was just as he said.

"With that much to start on, we had one thing that was certain—that is, the course of the bullet as it entered the professor's body. What I wanted to do was to go over to the spot where the murder occurred and figure all possible places where the bullet could have come from. It needn't have come from straight ahead, of course, since the professor could have had his body turned when the bullet

struck. As a matter of fact, assuming that the professor was standing about in the middle of the rostrum, the bullet came from the north because the bullet hole in the floor is considerably south of a line drawn directly through the center of the rostrum. Oh, by the way, I had Olsen request the Fair authorities not to fill up the hole in the floor. He hasn't called up, has he?"

"No, he hasn't. Is the hole important?"

"I think it is, but I'll come to that in a moment. I want to tell you what happened just as I found things out, so that you won't jump to any of my conclusions. I want to see if you don't think of something I haven't been able to. Because I'm stumped."

Al took from his pocket the sheet of paper on which he had sketched the triangle for the benefit of Olsen.

"Here's the idea I was working on," he explained, and told the chief how he had tried to make a mental projection of the line of the bullet.

"That's all pretty clear," Schmitz said. "I should have had that done myself."

"Well," Bennett continued, "I thought the

important thing was going to be the angle up and down because it would show the only possible places from which the bullet could have come, but that didn't turn out to be the important thing after all."

"Yes?" The chief was politely interested.

"I had Olsen standing there with one end of a piece of string held to the level of what I thought would be about the height of the professor's heart and I was studying angles when suddenly I noticed that the string was not lying along the groove of the bullet, but was a couple of inches to the north of it. I asked Olsen to move his body south and still the string wouldn't get into the groove. Finally he had to stretch his arm two feet south of the rostrum before the string could lie straight in the groove."

"What the devil does that mean?"

"I think it means that the bullet taken out of the floor wasn't the one which killed the professor. What do you think?"

Al rapidly sketched a floor plan of the platform with the narrowed end where the rostrum was. He put a dot in the center of this space.

"Here's approximately where the professor was standing. Here's where the bullet hole is. Now a line drawn between those two points and extended would approximately cross the farthest end of the northern wing of the building. A man might have been hidden there. It also crosses the cables of the sky-ride. Maybe that theory is still good, but——!"

"But what?"

Al took his pencil and drew a line from the bullet hole directly outward, missing the rostrum entirely and at almost a forty-five degree angle to the other line.

"That line," he said, "is the line taken by the bullet which entered the floor. There's no doubt about it because the groove is about five inches long."

"Five inches long?" the chief said. "A .22-bullet fired from a distance and penetrating the body of a man near the end of its flight couldn't go five inches even into that composition flooring, I shouldn't think."

"That's another angle I'd thought of, but hadn't had time to figure out. It looks to me

positive that the professor wasn't shot with the bullet that was in the floor."

"Maybe two shots were fired."

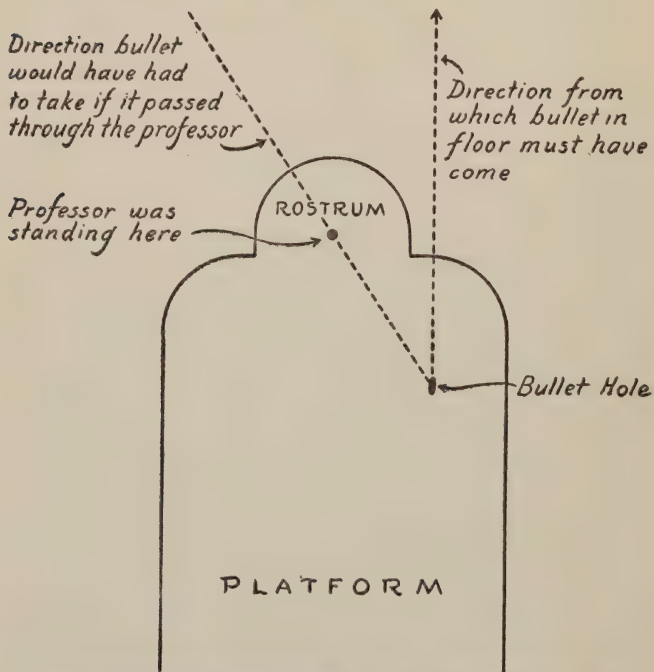


DIAGRAM BENNETT DREW FOR CHIEF SCHMITZENDORF

"All right, but where's the bullet that killed the professor? It wasn't in him."

"That's right. Was there only one bullet hole in the floor?"

"Absolutely. I'm positive there was no other."

"Say, let's go over and take a look at this situation. I'd like to see the spot with my own eyes. Your sketch is all right, but I'll feel more certain if I see for myself."

The chief rose and reached for his hat and coat.

"It looks as if we might be getting somewhere," he said, "and it's certainly a relief to me since so many people seem to be so vitally concerned with this great professor."

Al left to get his own hat and coat. When he returned a moment later he found the chief flopped into the chair in front of his desk. His face was as white as a ghost's and in his trembling hand he held a telegram, just received from Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Without a word Al snatched it from him and read:

Chief of Detectives

Detective Bureau

Chicago Ill

Have picked up shot beaten and unconscious old man resembling pictures Professor Arturo del Grafko of Almania stop

Clothing labels and papers in pocket contain his name stop Believe he is genuine professor

Arthur Johnson Chief of Police

"What the devil?" Bennett inquired breathlessly.

"I don't know."

"Well, let's put off that trip to the Fair grounds," said Bennett, rapidly copying the telegram. He ran to a telephone booth and called his office.

"Nell," he said to the telephone girl who answered, "get the chief of police, all the hospitals, and our local correspondent at Fort Wayne. And give me the city desk right away."

CHAPTER XI

SEIZE THE COFFIN

AFTER the first shock produced by the receipt of the telegram from the Fort Wayne police had subsided, developments in the now doubly mysterious World's Fair murder happened rapidly. Bennett had telephoned the story in and then had persuaded Hoffman, the city editor, to send a reporter down to Fort Wayne immediately, without waiting to learn whether or not it was the real professor who had been found.

As soon as he had finished talking to the city desk, the faithful Nell at the switchboard had the Fort Wayne chief of police on the wire.

"Hello," said Bennett, "this is Lieutenant Hills of the Chicago police talking. Yeah, in the chief's office. We just got your wire and the chief wants me to find out more about the man you've found."

Over the wire came the voice of the Fort Wayne chief.

"Some farmer picked him up six miles south of town," he said. "The fellow was lying alongside the road when this farmer came along in his car and saw him. He pulled him into his car and brought him into St. Mary's Hospital."

"How is he?"

"He's in bad shape. He's been shot just over the heart, and he's been beaten and is all bruised up. It looks like he'd been tortured and thrown from a car. Some of my men looked through his clothes and found a label with Professor del Grafko's name on it sewed in the lining of a vest pocket. Also, he had two letters addressed to the professor in his pocket. We took a newspaper picture of the professor over to the hospital and he looks just about like him, only his face is changed a good bit from the hard handling he got."

"Did you have a picture from abroad or from New York or one taken after he got to Chicago?"

"It was one of those when the professor—I mean I suppose the pretended professor—

arrived in Chicago. But he looked a lot like that picture all right."

"O.K., chief. Did you question him at all?"

"He's been unconscious ever since we picked him up."

"We'll send some men down right away. Thanks."

Al hung up the 'phone and then called his office again.

"I've got the City Hospital on the wire," Nell told him.

"Forget it and get St. Mary's," Al instructed.

"I'm holding Benson, our correspondent there, on another wire."

"Let me have him."

Al quickly discovered that the correspondent did not know any more about the case than the chief of police did. He asked him to go over to the hospital and police station at once and get all further details possible. Then he talked to the hospital. Again he assumed the rôle of one of the members of the staff of the Chicago chief of police. He learned that the victim was still unconscious.

After telephoning the desk the few details

he had learned from the Indiana police chief, he rushed back to the office of the chief of detectives. All the reporters were there, including Krueger, his own man.

"Of course, we can't be certain of the identification of this man found at Fort Wayne," the chief was saying, "but if he is the real professor, it will be a very simple matter to discover that fact. It may take several days, however. Even if he does not recover consciousness, we can undoubtedly tell whether he is really the professor, or a fake. I have already sent a squad to Fort Wayne to assist the police there and I have instructed them to ask the hospital authorities to make a thorough physical inspection of the man for identifying marks, moles, scars, and the like. I'll wire these to his family and we ought to have an answer back pretty quick."

"Excuse me, chief," interrupted Donovan, "but how about sending a radio to the boat and a cable to the authorities at Genoa, asking them to hold up the coffin in which the other guy is resting? They could hold that up at the docks pending development here. If you can't identify the guy down at Fort

Wayne, you might at least prove that the one in the coffin was not the real professor."

"Yeah. I'll do that too," the chief said to the reporter.

"What does all this mean then?" inquired Talbot, who had a very uncomfortable habit sometimes of coming directly to the point.

"It's too early to tell," the chief answered him, with no show of irritation. "It means, of course, one of two things. Either this man at Fort Wayne is the real professor or he isn't. And either the man who was shot here is the real professor or he isn't. Until we have further investigation into the identity of the man found in Indiana, we cannot do much."

"How could the real professor be in Indiana, and why didn't anybody know that the fellow who came here wasn't the real one?" Talbot inquired again.

"My son, if you'll answer those questions within the next five minutes, I'll put you in charge of a squad."

"The train crew that brought the professor here ought to know something," Bennett suggested.

"We'll question them, too. But we've got

to take things in their order, boys. We can't do everything at once."

"I'll find out about when that crew is due in town," Al volunteered.

"That will save me some work," the chief commented. "Let me know what you find out. Let the boys know too."

"Sure," said Al.

"That's all for now, boys," the chief said. "I'll keep you informed about developments."

Al called the Pennsylvania Railroad and by the time he had been switched to the fifth man on that switchboard, he wished he had let the police do their own work. Finally, however, he learned that the same crew which brought in the professor a few days ago would be coming in on the same train that afternoon. He gave this information to the boys and to the chief, who ordered two detectives to the station to bring the conductor, the Pullman conductor, and the porter of the car in which the professor traveled, over to the bureau for questioning.

The chief then called the Almanian consulate. The consul was out, but the girl put Sig. Renzi, the vice-consul, on the wire.

"What's that?" the latter shouted in astonishment. "Impossible! But what wonderful news, if it is true! I shall go immediately to the bedside."

He began an excited questioning about how to get to Fort Wayne, and the chief, after a few futile efforts, suggested that he call the information bureau of the railroad.

Half an hour later the consul himself called up the chief of detectives.

"What is this glorious news I hear?" he asked. "I understand our beloved professor may still be alive?"

"Yeah. Maybe," said the chief. He was still smarting somewhat under the recent strong words of the consul which were fresh in his mind.

"But tell me all about it. I must go to his bedside."

"It won't do you any good. He is unconscious."

"I do not care. I must see him. I understand that Sig. Renzi is planning to go there. If you talk to him again, will you stop him, please? Tell him these are my orders. I am the one who should have the honor of being

beside the professor. My assistant has presumed too much. He had no right——”

“I don’t know what your rules of precedence are,” the chief growled, “and I care less. I’ve got a lot to do, Mr. Consul, and while I hope sincerely that the man who has been found is really the professor whom you honor so, I’ve got a crime—a couple of crimes to work on, and you’ll have to excuse me.”

“But my position! And the professor is so dear to us. The king will be delighted to hear——”

“Yeah. Call the information desk at the Union Station. They’ll tell you how to get to Fort Wayne.”

The chief slammed the ’phone back on its standard. He was scowling to himself as he looked up and saw Al standing in the doorway.

“What’s the matter, boss?” Al asked him with a grin.

“Those damned Almanians and their national pride. They’ll drive me nuts!”

“National pride is a worthy attribute.”

“Yeah. But you ought to know how to get to Fort Wayne along with it!”

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, the Almanian consul and his assistant are fighting about who is going to sit at the bedside of the old man down in Fort Wayne. You can bet your last nickel that he doesn't give a rap. From what the chief down there says he'll be lucky if he pulls through. Somebody gave him a good going over. Say, Al, when I talked to the chief, he would hardly answer me at first. He said he'd already told all he knew to some lieutenant from this office. Nobody called up from here. You fellows haven't been pulling that one again, have you? You know I told you all that if I caught another one of you pretending he was the police department over the telephone, I was going to throw the whole lot of you out of here."

"Gee, I don't know, Schmitz. I thought the boys knew better than to try that stuff. Maybe it was somebody from the office downtown."

"Don't try to stuff me. It was one of you fellows, and if I ever find out——"

"I hope you don't," Al laughed. "Whoever it was has got a job to keep. It didn't really inconvenience you, did it?"

"Well, I don't like it."

"I think it's a dirty trick myself," Al agreed. "I used to do it all the time. My Irish brogue won me universal acclaim from my fellow workers. They were all jealous."

"To hell with the bunch of you," the chief said. "It's a wonder we ever solve any crimes."

"This one's getting quite interesting, don't you think?" Al suggested.

"I'll say so," the chief agreed. "This morning we didn't know how the professor was killed. Now we don't know whether he was killed or not, or even which guy is him."

"Well, somebody was shot, and under the law, it's still a crime to commit murder, even though you didn't shoot a professor."

"You're right. But it relieves me a lot to learn that maybe the professor is still alive. That's going to take the wind out of the sails of the King of Almania. Of course, it's not my fault that the real professor wasn't shot in my territory, but at least he's still alive—we hope, and that will be great cause for rejoicing."

"You aren't going to let up on the World's Fair angle?"

"No, Al. You did some smart work this morning and when we can get around to it we're going to go into that more thoroughly. Have you had any new ideas?"

"Not a one. I haven't had time to think on account of this new angle."

"Well, I'm sure going to go into that business at the Fair in great shape when we get time. Maybe late this afternoon. By the way, Olsen tells me that the Fair people have no objection to leaving that bullet hole in the floor. They're pretty anxious to have this thing cleared up too, you know. They don't want to scare any farmers away by the fear they'll be shot."

"How long has it been since you thought about the suitcase?" Al asked.

"The devil! I haven't thought about it all day. But I've got to go to that triple funeral tomorrow, Al. That's going to tear my heart out."

"I told you that if you got interested in this other case, it would take your mind off of that."

"It did that. But I'll bet you didn't bargain for these complications."

"No. But I like them."

A sergeant came in and handed a telegram to the chief.

"What is it?" Bennett asked eagerly.

The chief scanned it carefully.

"It's from the New York police," he said.

"It says, 'advise disposition guinea pigs.'"

"Send them a wire back," Al suggested, " 'disposition guinea pigs usually docile and home loving!' "

"Wise-cracking, eh?"

"Well, they don't seem to know. New York is so sophisticated, you know. Maybe they don't understand about guinea pigs."

"But seriously. What'll I tell them?"

"I don't think the guinea pigs are important. You wouldn't get anywhere by questioning them. They're important as a clue, but not as personalities. Wire them back and tell them you don't care. Or turn it over to the Fair authorities. That'll stump them."

"I'll do that," the chief agreed. He called a sergeant. "Call up the executive committee of the Century of Progress," he ordered. "Tell them they've got a lot of guinea pigs in Al-

toona, Pennsylvania, and ask them what they're going to do about it."

Krueger appeared at the door and wig-wagged to Al.

"I'll be back in a minute," the reporter told the chief. He left the room.

"The desk wants you," Krueger told him.

Al went to the press room and called.

"You'd better run down to Fort Wayne," Hoffman told him over the 'phone. "This angle looks damn good to us. If this is the real professor, we've got a story that will knock the spots out of the murder yarn."

"What can I do interviewing a man who's unconscious?" Al asked. "Besides, you've already got Pratt down there."

"I know, but the big shot wants you to go down, too."

"Listen," Al said, almost in a whisper, "I'm hot on the trail of the guy who murdered the supposed professor. I may flash you back any minute with the dope. If you send me to Fort Wayne, we may get scooped."

He waited at the 'phone.

"Do you really know?" Krueger asked with

incredulous round eyes. Al gave him a big wink and a knowing smile.

"Yeah?" he said, again turning his attention to the telephone. "That's really best. I'll 'phone you as soon as I get the dope."

He turned to Krueger. "I got out of that," he said. "I'm in the chief's office."

He went back. The chief was on the 'phone. He seemed intent on the conversation he was hearing.

"Thanks, old man," he said, and hung up the 'phone.

"Who was that and what did he say?" Al asked.

"It was the Fort Wayne chief. He said the professor came to for just one minute. He could only say one sentence and then he lapsed into a coma again.

"What did he say?"

"He asked for a big brown suitcase, and he reached his hand down into the bedclothes as if he were looking into his pockets—for the baggage check, I suppose."

"What did I tell you?" asked Al triumphantly. "I guess that proves that the suitcase had the professor's invention in it."

"I hope he dies," the chief said, suddenly remembering his own men who had been stricken down.

"Not until he's told us a few things," Al replied. "That bird knows a lot of things we'd like to find out."

CHAPTER XII

DILETTANTE SLEUTHING

LATE that afternoon three men were brought into the detective bureau for questioning.

The conductor and the Pullman conductor of the train on which the professor, or alleged professor, had journeyed to Chicago maintained stoutly, and to the satisfaction of their questioners, that they had observed nothing in connection with the famous passenger which would have given them any cause for suspicion. Both declared that they knew the professor was on their train—they could not have been unaware of that fact because of the excited comments of other passengers. But neither of them had noticed anything amiss when the train stopped at Fort Wayne. The conductor had been inside the station getting his routine orders. The Pullman conductor had been four cars down, chatting with a news vendor about the standing of the

Cardinals and the Cubs. He had been aware of nothing out of the ordinary.

The third man, the porter on the car in which the professor had occupied lower six on his journey to Chicago, shed more light on the situation. A big, ebony black man, he stood six feet two and would have been handsome had he not been transformed by the unnecessary fear which took hold of him on being questioned by the police. All of the men were questioned by Lieutenant Harris in the presence of his chief.

"What's your name?" he asked the big black man.

"Gold Refined Washington."

"What's that?"

"Gold Refined Washington."

The reporters snickered, but the lieutenant kept a solemn face and frowned on the others.

"Were you the porter on car 168 which arrived at the Union Station at three-forty-five on the afternoon of June 5?"

"Yes, sir. I think I was."

"Was Professor del Grafko one of your passengers?"

"Well, there was a man with a white beard. He was the professor, I think. They took lots of pictures when he got off the train in Chicago."

"Did he leave the car at any time on the way to Chicago?"

"No, sir. He didn't leave the car. That is, he didn't leave it till Fort Wayne, but he come right back."

"What happened at Fort Wayne?"

"Well, sir, at Fort Wayne some man got on and he handed this old man a telegram. I heard him say it was terrible important. The old man asked me how long we stopped there, and I told him about five minutes. He got off the train with the other man. He seemed powerful worried."

"Then what happened?"

"Nothing happened much. I thought sure he had missed the train, that's all. I had my stool back up on the vestibule and we was pullin' out when I see this old fellow runnin' along. He swung up and got aboard. I helped him up myself. But he caught the train all right."

"Did he say anything after he got aboard?"

"No. He just says, 'Thanks, porter,' and that's all, and then he settled down to reading again, like he did all the way, and when he got off he give me a dollar. That's all."

Further questioning revealed nothing more. When the lieutenant began to ask the porter questions about whether the man who caught the train looked like the man who got off, the big black face took on an expression of pain. The white teeth showed in a noble attempt at a grin, but the big eyes rolled in terror.

"Sure, boss, I can't say as to that. I was glad he caught the train, that's all."

The chief seemed satisfied at this questioning. He called the hospital at Fort Wayne and was gratified to learn that his men had arrived.

"Question all station employees and anybody else who would have been around the station," he instructed Lieutenant Dixon at the other end of the wire. "The porter says the professor left the train at Fort Wayne and caught it again at the last minute. There's a chance that someone else may have been substituted."

Before Al knocked off for the day he dropped in on the chief.

"The porter angle isn't so bad," he suggested.

"No. It gives a possible opportunity for a substitution."

"And a damn clever one—if that's what happened."

"I think that's what did happen. Somebody getting on the train at Fort Wayne, of all places, and telling the professor he had an important telegram."

"Yep. Sounds good to me. Let's call it a day. I thought I had something hot this morning, but I didn't count on all this false beard stuff."

"He couldn't have had a false beard. The coroner examined him."

"Oh, I don't mean really. But if we have to solve the mystery of who killed the professor as well as why wasn't it the professor that was killed, it gets to be somewhat interesting."

"I think the main thing now is to find out whether this is really the professor at Fort Wayne," said Schmitz.

"And I think the thing is to find out why somebody shot the fellow he thought was the professor at the World's Fair," countered Al.

"That's your angle."

"That's THE angle. It doesn't matter whether this is the real professor at Fort Wayne. The guy who shot the man who was standing in the rostrum thought he was shooting the professor."

"How do you know?"

"My God! A man who is so desperate as to commit a murder in front of ten thousand people isn't going to bother to shoot an impostor. He could attend to him later. Whoever shot that man on the rostrum thought he was shooting the professor all right."

"I guess you're right, Al."

"You know I'm right. When we find out why somebody shot the man on the rostrum, maybe we'll know why somebody else kidnapped the professor at Fort Wayne. There's two angles to this thing now, and I think the most important one is the one under our noses—that is, it's under mine."

"That's so. But I hope that it really is the professor in Fort Wayne."

"So do I," said Al as he turned to leave the chief.

"See you tomorrow," he said over his shoulder.

At the *Journal* office in the late afternoon he found Helen Maynard, the girl reporter. He had not seen her since the night before last when they had parted under slightly strained circumstances, and he was a little embarrassed at meeting her again. However, he bravely strode up to her desk and spoke to her. He thought her smile a little more reserved than usual, but she was cordial enough and he was pleased.

"I'm waiting for that scoop of the century," she said, with just a trace of mockery in her eyes.

Al flushed. "I changed my mind," he explained.

"What? You didn't even try to get the suitcase? You seemed so determined when you left me."

"Well, I thought about trying, but I decided to go to sleep instead."

"A really intelligent reaction on your part."

"Perhaps."

"At any rate, the suitcase is safe now. You can't find out its secret unless you go in for deep-sea diving. That isn't one of your hobbies, is it?"

"No. But I think I can find out about the thing from somebody who knows."

"Who's that?"

"Uhmmtttttttt, Mystery! Say, would you like to do a little dilettante sleuthing with me tonight?"

"Any danger to life and limb?"

"Well, possibly, but only from my variations on the tango. I never can quite rhumba all the steps."

"I hate puns."

"All right. I'll stop, but how about the sleuthing expedition amidst Chicago's gay life? I know a very nice young fellow named Carl Ross who works in the Drake Travel Bureau. He goes around some with a very pretty little Almanian girl who works in the consul's office. I thought I'd ask him to invite her out tonight and we could make a foursome. Maybe her childish prattle might reveal something to us about the state of affairs in Almania."

"That sounds fine to me. I haven't been dancing for weeks. Most of my invitations recently have been to dingy back rooms where a lot of men drink, smoke, and talk shop. I'm bored with that kind of an evening, and besides it isn't very dignified."

Al called his friend Ross and asked him if he would invite his little Almanian girl to an evening "out." "I'll stand the check," he volunteered. Ross was delighted and promised to call back in five minutes. Al went to the city desk.

"Any news from the Indiana front?" he asked Felz. The late editor removed a handful of folded typewritten sheets from a spindle where he kept duplicates of all stories and shuffled through them. He picked out a couple of sheets and handed them to the reporter.

"A couple of late bulletins from Pratt, down there," he explained. "The old man is mumbling some and they think maybe he is going to come to his senses soon. The sheriff and the local police are scouring the countryside trying to locate the spot where he was held. Oh, yes. The police have also sent a physical description to the detective

bureau. He has a scar two inches long, like a burn, on the back of his left calf and a mole the size of a dime on his right shoulder. The bureau is wiring the description to the family."

A light flashed on the telephone box and Felz answered. He held the instrument up to Al. "It's for you," he said. "Take it right here."

The call was from Ross, announcing that his Almanian friend would be present that evening.

"I'll pick you up at the Drake at eight," Al said. He arranged with Helen to call for her and then went to his apartment to prepare himself for the evening's festivities.

Ross was full of questions about the World's Fair murder and the suitcase mystery. He was intensely interested in Al's work and had many times visited him in the press room, but he had not seen him since the exciting developments of the past few days.

"I can't answer all your questions at once," Al told him. "We'll probably be talking about it all evening and you'll hear about it then. I'm bringing a girl reporter along and

she's just as interested as you are. Your girl also ought to have quite a personal interest in the affair."

They picked up the two girls in rapid succession, since Helen lived on Elm Street and Ross's friend, Ilta Serfano, on Cedar. The Almanian girl was young, just past twenty, and a true beauty. She had a high smooth forehead, wide-set, dark brown, sparkling eyes, and an attractive smile which disclosed two rows of small but very white and glistening teeth. She spoke a precise and slow English with a delightful accent which tickled Al the moment he heard it, for Carl had often told him that it sent shivers of delight up and down his spine.

In answer to the inevitable question of where to go, all agreed not to visit the Fair grounds on account of the crowds, and the two girls were unanimous in their opposition to those horrid stuffy night clubs. They finally decided on the board walk at the Edgewater Beach. There, beneath a brilliant moon, with an almost cool breeze off the lake now and then stirring the leaves of the trees, Al soon found himself dancing with Helen. She

danced beautifully, subconsciously, and seemed to lose herself in the music. Al was dreadfully conscious of her nearness. He mused as they glided about on how strange it was that a woman's body seemed so much more attractive when the head on top of it had a real brain inside. He thought of some of the girls he had danced with, close-clinging, rounded blondes or serpentine tall brunettes who had breathed into his ear, and wondered why he had ever bothered. He was very glad he was with Helen, even if she were a girl reporter.

At the table, when the highballs were mixed, the dynamite being supplied from Al's flask, the talk naturally turned to the two exciting stories which had occupied the press for the past few days.

Helen laughingly told of Al's recent threat to steal the suitcase and get a scoop for his paper. He was relieved to find that he didn't mind her chaffing, and as a matter of fact was each hour becoming more thankful that he hadn't been successful in his foolish plan. The hours wore on. Al found to his delight that the Almanian girl was a good dancer

too. His enjoyment was somewhat inhibited, however, by the necessity of continually trying to catch a glimpse of Carl and Helen dancing together. He felt that these two were getting on far too well, and it disturbed him when he saw that magnificent smile of Helen's turned full force on Carl, whom he knew to be very susceptible.

"I hope we haven't bored you by talking shop all the time," he said to Ilta as he escorted her back to the table after their third dance together.

"Oh, no," she smiled. "I hear nothing but the murder of the professor all day at the office. The air down there is very tense."

"What do you mean? Are they angry at the police? Anyway, I'm sure it's the real professor who has been found at Fort Wayne."

"It isn't that so much, but the consul and the vice-consul do not get on very well together," the girl answered. "They are of different political parties, you know, and the consul cannot get rid of his assistant because he is on civil service."

"What do they disagree about?"

"Oh, political questions, mostly. And then

about the professor. Each one claims that the other knows what his invention was and each denies that he knows. I have heard them quarreling many times. I have enough to do to keep on the good side of both of them at the same time."

"Did they both go down to see the professor in the hospital?" Al asked.

"No. Sig. Renzi, the vice-consul, said he was going and he left the office. Half an hour later, Sig. Benefio came in and heard about the news. He was very excited and he rushed out right away to go down to Fort Wayne. About an hour after he left, Sig. Renzi came back and said he'd changed his mind. Business delayed his going. I think that's funny, too, because he could identify the professor if anyone could."

"Why? Did he know him?"

"He ought to. He was engaged to Professor del Grafko's youngest daughter five years ago, but the professor stopped the match because he didn't approve. They had a terrific to-do about it and there was a lot of talk in the papers at home."

"Say, Al," broke in Carl, "if this fellow

knew the professor like that he should have recognized that it was an impostor who came here—if it was.”

“And isn’t that a motive, too? This fight over the daughter’s hand?” suggested Helen.

“Oh, no, no, no!” The Almanian girl was voluble in her protest. “Sig. Renzi is happily engaged to a Chicago society girl. I am sure he has forgotten the other matter.”

“Yes,” Al agreed, “I think we can rule that out. If this vice-consul was going to pop the old man off because he had had a fight about his daughter, he would have put poison in his soup, or something like that. He wouldn’t have shot him in broad daylight with the risk of thousands of people seeing him. I wish I knew why he didn’t go down to Fort Wayne, though.”

“And I don’t care,” Helen said impertinently. Al looked at her. The music had commenced again, and her eyes were dreamy.

“Shall we dance?” he asked.

“How did you guess it?” she answered.

CHAPTER XIII

AL EVOLVES A THEORY

WHEN the chief arrived at his office the next morning, he found Bennett impatiently awaiting him, eager to impart the news he had learned the night before. Schmitz listened attentively while the reporter repeated the remarks of the Almanian secretary.

"What I don't get," Al said, "is why this vice-consul didn't recognize that the fellow who arrived here was not the real professor. I think it's a safe assumption now that the Fort Wayne man is really Professor del Grafko. Also, why didn't the vice-consul admit when he was first questioned that he knew the professor and had been engaged to his daughter?"

"Well," the chief suggested, "he wouldn't want to involve himself in a lot of publicity about his past love affairs. He's engaged to a Chicago society girl now, you say. Even an

innocent man doesn't like to give evidence which looks incriminating."

"I'm not so sure he's innocent."

"You think he killed the professor?"

"Well, he might have arranged to have him killed."

"But why would he kill a man he knew wasn't the professor?"

"Maybe it was such a good double he didn't know."

"Yeah. And maybe he knew and that's why he had him killed." The chief shrugged.

"Well, it's too much for me, but let's get this young fellow in here and scare the wits out of him. Now that we know these things about him we'll make him talk."

"I think that's the last thing to do right now, Schmitz."

"What?"

"Question this fellow, I mean. If by any chance he is connected with the thing in any way, this will tip him off. Why not just lay off of him and the consul too—that is, in public. But I'd put somebody tailing both of them right away. We're agreed that the crime, both crimes, are connected with the

invention and probably have some international political aspect. The fact that the professor asked for a brown suitcase can't mean anything but that the suitcase now at the bottom of the lake contained his invention. One of the gang who kidnapped him took his check for the suitcase, came up here and got it, and was on his way to the I.C. station to go somewhere with it when our very efficient fire department decided to co-operate with the police department and not only prevent his escape with his prize, but condemn and execute him as well."

Sergeant Burns appeared with a cablegram and handed it to the chief.

"Well, this settles one thing," Schmitzen-dorf said, reading aloud:

Father had mole scar exactly similar your cabled description. Signed, Antonio del Grafko.

"Now we know that it is the professor down at Fort Wayne. That's a piece of news for you and a relief from the strain."

"Yeah. Now all we have to do is to think

up a name for the guy who was shot at the World's Fair. I've been calling him the professor for so long I'm going batty since we've found another one. Let's agree solemnly that we'll call the dead one the impostor."

"How about the fake?"

"I like impostor better."

"All right. Have it your own way, Al. You always were particular. Say, that was quick time on this cable. We sent a night letter last night and here we've got an answer already this morning."

"There's seven hours' difference in time, you know. They got your night letter a few hours after you sent it and they answered with a direct cable."

"Ain't nature wonderful?"

"Sure. But how about a little detecting this morning, professor? Are you coming over to the Fair with me? We were on our way yesterday, you know, when we were so rudely interrupted by our victim suddenly coming to life."

"I can't make it for a couple of hours, Al, but I'm anxious to go then."

"O.K. Any news from Indiana?"

"Stick around. I'll get the boys on the 'phone."

The chief put in a call for his men at the hospital and learned from them that the professor had passed a fairly calm night, but that he hadn't regained consciousness. The doctors gave him about a fifty-fifty chance to live, he was told. The chief told Lieutenant Dixon on the other end of the wire of the cable he had received, and warned him to keep a close watch on the professor and see that he came to no harm.

"We're keeping a strict watch in shifts," the lieutenant said. "The Fort Wayne chief has got a man here all the time too."

"Have they had any luck locating where the professor was kept hidden?" Schmitz asked.

"No, but they're sure now that the fellows in the car that shot and killed the motorcycle patrolman the other day near here had the professor with them at the time."

"Have you questioned the station employees?"

"Yes. But we didn't learn much. We did

find out from the telegraph company that the professor didn't send a wire from here and none was addressed to him here either, so that telegram stall on the train was just a frame-up to get him off."

"Is that all?"

"Well, a newsboy at the station says he saw an old man being pushed into a big car that drove away from the station. He can't remember what day it was and the more we question him the more he is sure it was the day the professor was kidnapped. He's sort of a half wit, and only nine years old. We don't know whether to believe him."

"He's probably right," the chief said. "That sounds like what really happened. Well, let us know the minute the professor regains consciousness."

He hung up the telephone and briefly recited to Al the details of the conversation he had just had with the lieutenant.

"You'd better tell the boys," he said. "Then I won't have to repeat it to them all over again."

Bennett gave the latest dope to his fellow reporters, including Krueger, his own relief

man. When the latter had finished giving in his story, he called to Al.

"The desk wants to talk to you," he announced.

It was Harry Hoffman on the other end of the wire.

"Are you taking a vacation, or can we expect to hear from you now and then?" he inquired with some heat. "You at least ought to let us know how you're getting along."

"I'll call you back," Bennett said, and hung up the 'phone.

He went to a booth and called Hoffman back.

"I didn't want to talk in the press room," he explained. "Give me just a couple of days, Harry, and I'll have a real story."

"Sure it's going to be all ours?"

"Absolutely. I've got the chief's word for that. Of course; that is, if I dig out the story, which I'm now doing to his entire satisfaction."

Hoffman grunted. He didn't sound at all satisfied, but after all if he couldn't trust Bennett, whom could he trust among his staff of reporters?

"O.K., Al. But keep in touch with us here a little more frequently. You can't tell when something may break."

"Righto!"

Al hung up the telephone with a defiant flourish. He felt confident that somehow or other he would be able to unravel the mysterious chain of events which had followed the arrival of the supposed professor in the city. Yet he was a little apprehensive, too, for fear he should fail. If he did, he felt that he could stand the scorn of his city desk, but if his fellow reporters ever learned that he had asked for a relief man from his beat on the theory that he was going to solve the mystery, he would never hear the last of it. He would just have to quit the newspaper business, that was all.

Somewhat disconsolate over this dire prospect, he decided that he would force himself to further work, although he felt that nothing real could be accomplished until he had taken Schmitz to the Fair grounds and convinced him that his deductions about the bullet were true. He hadn't yet been able to

interpret fully the significance of his discovery, but he felt that it was significant and that sooner or later the explanation would come to him and help solve the entire problem.

Their chances were far better now that the real professor had been found, Al mused. When he recovered consciousness he could undoubtedly throw a great deal of light on many things which were now extremely puzzling.

"I think we're getting somewhere," he said to himself. "We've got a motive and a corpse, and fortunately the intended victim is still alive, which is convenient to say the least. All we need now are some suspects."

He had strolled back to the press room and declined to enter a dealer's choice poker game which was going on. Instead he sat down in his favorite chair near the window and peered out.

Schmitz 'phoned to announce that he would have to delay their trip until two o'clock. Three hours to spare. Al decided to go over to the *Journal* office and have a look at the

files. He went direct to the "morgue" without stopping in the local room. He gave a cheery greeting to the sour-faced Mac, head of the reference room.

"How are things, my boy? Picking up?"

"Yeah. Picking up cigar butts," was the reply.

"What's the matter, Mac?"

"Well, my wife's got pleurisy, the three kids have got the measles, my mother-in-law is staying with us, and the new managing editor has photophobia. Every time a new story breaks he asks for all the pictures in the place. He looks at them, smiles, throws them all out, and decides to use a picture of a girl in a bathing-suit after all. Look at that pile of prints!" He pointed to a stack of loosely piled pictures three feet high standing in the corner. "We've got to file all those over again. I've been working overtime every night."

"That's tough, Mac. Say, if it isn't too much trouble, I'd like to have all the general clips on Almanian and everything you've got, closet clips and all, on Professor del Grafko."

"She's got 'em," Mac replied, jerking his

head toward a desk at the other side of the room.

Al had not noticed her before, but there sat Helen, engrossed in a sheaf of clippings she had taken from a large pile of envelopes lying before her. He walked over to her and stood beside her desk. Suddenly realizing his presence, she looked up, and when she saw him, blushed violently.

"Brushing up on Almaniac?" he asked.

"Well," she admitted with an embarrassed smile, "I didn't have anything to do so I thought I'd just read a few clippings. I thought maybe I might find a clue for you. I'm really terribly interested."

"I'm glad you are," said Al. "I had the same idea myself. That's why I'm here. Maybe you can save me some time. Did you find out anything?"

"No. I wouldn't say that. I found out that the professor is a lot more famous than I had realized. Some of these clips go back twenty years. He was quite a figure in the world of science then. There isn't really much about him that hasn't been printed in the papers since his death—I mean his supposed

death—I'm so used to thinking he's really dead."

"Anything about enemies, or anything like that?"

"No, not exactly, although there's a whole envelope of clips on his fight with Professor Stieger of the University of Chicago ten years ago. That was just a fight on paper that they carried on in scientific journals, but it lasted two years. Apparently they were bitter enemies, but I can't understand what they were fighting about. Something about radio waves."

Al sat down across from her and pored through the clips. Now and then he commented on something he found, notably the story of the professor's recent secret trip to Africa, about which there was also a great mystery. The news dispatches from Almanian contained reports of a series of typical incidents common to all Balkan countries. None of them seemed to Al to have any bearing on the case. Recently the clippings were all devoted to the struggle between the communists and the fascists and the control of the country

by the latter party. Now and then, however, there was a story about the professor's invention and his plan to give it to the world at large, but indications as to its nature were of the vaguest.

Al found his eyes straying from the clips to the face of the girl across from him.

"I had a good time last night," he said.

"I had a wonderful time," she answered with another of those devastating smiles.

They read on for a while in silence. Finally she said she had to go.

"I'll take you to lunch," he suggested.

"I'm sorry. I have to be at the Palmer House at one. I'm covering a luncheon there."

"I'm sorry too," said Al, more disappointed than he would have cared to admit. "Some other day."

"I hope so," she answered, and was off.

Al ate in a one-arm restaurant across the street and went back to the bureau. The chief was waiting for him.

"Anything new?"

"I just had them on the 'phone and the professor is still mum. He talks sometimes, but he

just mumbles in Almanian and they don't know what he's saying."

"Can't the consul interpret?"

"That bird! He's a fine patriot. He was down there yesterday afternoon, but he stayed only five minutes. Dixon said he came into the room and fussed around the way those foreigners do so that the nurse had to tell him to shut up. He stood by the bed and slobbered something about his dear, dear professor and how terrible conditions were in America. Then he said how amazingly he looked like the man who was shot at the World's Fair, and then he ducked. He never even asked if there was anything he could do."

"Nice guy!"

"Yeah. Let's be on our way."

They went directly to the Science Building and Al explained in detail the processes he had gone through when he was there with Sergeant Olsen.

"Look," he said. "I'm standing where Mr. Impostor stood. You take a squint at the line of that bullet."

"By golly, you're right!" the chief exclaimed. "That shot was coming along

straight, about two feet south of the rostrum. Even if it had gone through the professor and had been deflected by a chair or something like that, it couldn't have possibly made a track like this."

"Nope. And what do you make of it?"

"Al, that was fired from an airplane. There's no other possible place it could have come from. Look at those towers of the electrical buildings over there. I don't think a .22 would even carry that far. I'm going to arrest that aviator."

"Well, maybe so. But what about the bullet that killed Mr. Impostor?"

"I'll get the damned coroner's physician fired. I'll bet that bullet is still in the body and he didn't find it."

"We'll learn that when the Genoa police get the coffin," Al reminded him.

"That's right."

Al's face suddenly lighted up with excitement.

"I've got it!" he shouted.

"Got what? The bullet?"

"No. I've solved it! Oh, boy, wait till you hear this!"

He grasped the chief by the arm.

"Now look here," he began. "I've just figured out . . ."

As he continued to talk, the chief's eyes too began to blaze with excitement.

CHAPTER XIV

A SOCIETY GIRL WEEPS

IN THE next three days Bennett alternated between elation and despair. At times he seemed to be on the threshold of a solution of every angle of the mystifying case, then something would happen to shatter his hopes. He did not know yet who had killed the man impersonating the professor, but he felt sure that at last he was on the right track, and that he would eventually find out with certainty.

As soon as he had excitedly explained his new theory to the chief, the two men parted.

"I'll be on tap until six o'clock," the chief assured him.

"I'll get in touch with you," Bennett told him, and he dashed back to the *Journal* and to the "morgue."

"Hello, Mac," he greeted the gloomy one. "I'm back. I've got picturephobia myself now. I want all prints and plates, whether

we used them or not, showing the crowd on the platform behind the rostrum the day the professor was shot."

"What in the devil do you want that for?" Mac growled.

Bennett was about to say "None of your business," but thought better of it. There was no use in unduly rousing Mac. He was nasty enough when he was supposedly your friend.

"That's simple," Bennett said. "Does it seem logical to you that the fellows sitting behind the professor would not have noticed it when a bullet dug into the floor right at their feet—or at the feet of one of them? Somebody must have noticed that bullet crash into the floor and yet, when questioned right after the shooting, he didn't say a word about it. That shows he must be in cahoots with whoever did it or must have some reason for keeping still."

"That sounds like pretty thin milk to me," Mac said sourly. "You police reporters get the damndest ideas and you're always going off on wild-goose chases. And that makes more work for me."

"But you'll get me those prints and plates, won't you, Mac? And let's make it snappy. I'm in a hurry."

Bennett fumed while Mac laboriously pored over the material he had. Finally he announced that there were no such pictures.

"Only one taken from the ground that shows the professor's head and shoulders above the rostrum," he announced. "It doesn't show any of the people behind him."

"Are you sure, Mac?" asked Bennett desperately.

"Absolutely."

"No picture service prints either?"

"Not a thing."

Bennett sighed with disappointment, but remembered to thank Mac before leaving to go back to the bureau.

He told Schmitz of his frustrated hopes.

"There's only one thing to do then," the chief suggested. "I'll put a dozen men to work tonight. They can get the lineup in general from the Fair committee. Then they can question everybody who was there. It may be a little slow, but it will be certain."

"That's fine, Schmitz. You know what to

ask them. Anybody in any of the back rows, just let them go. Find out the ones who were in the front and second rows near that bullet hole. They're the ones we really want to talk to."

"We ought to know by noon, tomorrow," the chief assured him.

Al slept fitfully that night. Huge headlines kept running across in front of his sleeping eyes. "*Journal* Reporter Solves Crimes"—"Fair Murderer Caught." He dreamed he was writing his story. He proudly wrote his by-line and then those words, "Copyright, 1933, by The Evening Journal." He was surprised and a little chagrined, when he awoke in the morning.

He spent a nervous forenoon, listening to the men as they came in and gave their reports, eliminating almost everyone on the platform. He called Hoffman at the city desk.

"It's getting very warm now," he assured him. "I think something will break in the next twenty-four hours."

"It had better," Hoffman told him. "The

old man is getting sort of sore about all these promises and nothing happening."

"It's no good if we spill it in pieces. That would spoil it all," pleaded Bennett.

"I suppose so. Well, good luck to you."

By noon, as the chief had promised, Al's first suspense was over.

"Here's the lineup of the people in the four chairs to the right of the center aisle on the front row," the chief said. "I haven't got the second row quite fixed up yet."

"That's not so important," Al said. "Let's have the dope."

"First from the right, Alderman O'Connor."

"He's out."

"Next, the vice-consul."

"Oh."

"Next, the consul."

"And a couple of 'ohs.'"

"Next, Professor Stieger of the University of Chicago physics department. He's out."

"Not so fast. I'm not so sure about that. He and the professor were bitter enemies a few years ago."

"Is that so? Well, he's in then. He certainly didn't act suspicious, though, when he was asked about the seating arrangement. As a matter of fact, he told us about the consul and the vice-consul sitting next to him."

"How about them? How did they act?"

"The man we sent up there couldn't find either of them in. The girl said they were out and she didn't know when they'd return."

"That's fine. Don't let him go back."

"I've sent two men out to tail them when they come in."

"Gee, Schmitz. I thought you did that long ago."

"No. I didn't get around to it. But I've done it now."

"Thanks. This is swell."

"What do we do next?"

"Well, if you're still willing to work my way on this, I'd lay low for a while on questioning any of these fellows. Just tail them and let me do a little private detecting. They're not going to run away, I'm sure."

Al went back to the chief's office after lunch.

"Anything new from Indiana?" he asked.

"No, but I had a mysterious telephone call about fifteen minutes ago. It was from Miss Letitia Cardinal, and may have a lot to do with what we're after."

"The name sounds familiar," Al meditated.

"She's the fiancée of the vice-consul," the chief said. "She told me she had a very confidential matter she wanted to speak to me about, and could I see her here in private. She's on her way down."

"How about a little movie stuff, Schmitz? Is it O.K. if I step into the next room and we leave the door open an inch or so?"

"It's O.K. with me, my boy."

Five minutes later the girl was announced and Al, with a broad wink, stepped into the next room, leaving the door slightly ajar.

"I am Miss Cardinal," he heard through the door. Her voice was cultured and very pleasant, but it revealed a nervous tension.

"I am delighted to meet you," the chief responded. "What can I do for you?"

"This is a very confidential matter. Can you promise me that what I am about to tell you will not get into the newspapers? I am to be married next week and I cannot

afford to have any publicity—especially of this kind.”

“I cannot guarantee that your story will not appear in the newspapers, but I can assure you that I shall not breathe a word of it if you request me not to,” the chief said gallantly.

“I do request you. I am engaged to marry Sig. Renzi, the vice-consul of Almanian. I believe you have heard of him?”

“I have even talked with him, due to the recent unfortunate circumstances at the Fair grounds.”

“Well, then, you know what a splendid person he is. Last night he was invited to our house to dinner. It was a large party that Mother was giving in honor of our coming marriage, but one of the informal kind, you know, just some of the older friends of the family.”

“Yes?”

“He didn’t appear, nor did he send any message of explanation. I was dreadfully afraid that one of the society editors would get hold of the news, but fortunately our guests were very discreet. We were all naturally terribly worried. The dinner party was

ghastly. As a matter of fact, I couldn't go through with it. I rushed upstairs to my room and burst into tears when dinner was half through."

"I can understand."

"At first I was just terribly angry at him. Then, of course, I began to be worried. When I was furious I would make no effort to communicate with him, but later, when I began to be afraid, I called his apartment. No one was there. This morning I called the consulate and was as discreet as I could be and still find out what they knew. They simply said that he hadn't come in yet. I left my number and they promised to have him call. I'm sure that something dreadful has happened to him."

"Did you have any intimation that anything like this might happen?"

"Oh, no! He was always so punctual and so considerate of others. Of course, he has been terribly worried recently about this tragedy you spoke of. I thought that when it was found out that the real professor, his countryman, still lived, he would feel much better, but he still seemed as nervous as ever."

"Well, Miss Cardinal, if some accident has befallen your fiancé, the best way to discover that is by the routine methods, but that would involve publicity. Reporters always learn about bulletins concerning missing persons."

"Oh, I can't have that. Isn't there some other way?"

"I can assign some of my men to investigate secretly, but that would not be as effective, I am sure."

"Oh, please do it that way, and please, please find him soon."

Al could hear the girl suddenly begin to weep softly.

"Here's my telephone number," she said between sobs. "Please call me the moment you learn anything."

The chief did his best to soothe her, and she finally left. Al bounced into the office.

"Did you hear all that?" the chief asked.

"I did. Every word."

"What do you make of it?"

"He's taken it on the lam."

"Yeah. That's swell for us, isn't it?"

"I told you to tail him."

"Cut it out, Al. Who's running the detective bureau? Me or you?"

"Sorry, Schmitz. I was disappointed."

"Well, it certainly looks bad for that boy and it makes your theory sound good."

"I should think we could pick him up before he leaves the country."

"I'll wire the New York police confidentially. They can watch the boats."

"Don't forget Baltimore, Boston, and Montreal."

"That's right."

"And besides, I don't think you'll find him on a boat. I've got an idea where he is."

"You have, eh?"

"Yes, sir. And it's not far from here."

"Say. He won't stay around here. He's running away because he's afraid of us."

"Of us?"

"Yeah."

"Maybe."

"Well, I'll send somebody to his apartment, etcetera, etcetera."

"Don't give it to the press."

"I thought that's why you were standing behind the door. Did you hear me tell her

that I wouldn't breathe a word of it? I was going to let you do the breathing."

"It's another one of those things that I think we should keep to ourselves for the moment. When this story really breaks, it's going to be juicy. I can stand it to wait now."

"You're the boss, Al. I never before saw a reporter so eager to keep news out of print."

"I've seen too many good stories spoiled by what we newspaper men choose to call premature publicity," Al smiled. "When this one breaks, it's going to be ripe."

He went into the press room.

"Who was the swell moll that was just in the chief's office?" asked Talbot, the city press man and the only reporter in the room at the time.

"Haven't the slightest idea," Bennett lied. "Better ask the chief. I haven't seen him this afternoon."

Bennett called the city desk with some elation.

"It's getting hot," he assured Hoffman.

"But, my God, man, when do we print it?"

"The fruits of the tree of patience are sweet, but they are only for the wise," Bennett an-

swered. "I made that up myself. It would be from the ancient Chinese of Hoo Kai Pooh, if he'd been smart enough to write it."

"You're completely screwy, Al. Call me up when you've got something to say. Good-bye.—Oh, wait a minute. Here's a little news dispatch that might interest you. Some guy whose name I can't pronounce has just proclaimed himself dictator in Almanian, and he's calling Sig. Benefio, the Chicago consul, back to Almanian to give him a place in the cabinet."

"That's interesting. Thanks, Harry. No kidding, I'll have something real for you soon."

When he had replaced the telephone on its stand, Al thought seriously for a moment. "Another birdie about to fly the coop."

He went in to see the chief and tell him the news.

"I've got a little bit of news myself," the chief said, before Al had time to tell him about the Almanian coup.

"What is it?"

"Another one of those cables. I'm getting quite used to them now."

"And it says . . .?"

"It's from the Genoa police and it says that they seized the coffin as we asked them to, but that the damn thing was empty."

"Whew!" Al whistled a little tune which helped him to think when his brain was suddenly shocked like this.

"Empty, eh?"

"That's what the cable says."

"But somebody was with that coffin all the way to New York," Al suggested, "and you can't open a coffin on shipboard."

"Yeah. And who was with the coffin? You ought to remember that."

The reporter looked up startled.

"The vice-consul took it to the boat."

"That's the baby. The vice-consul."

"This is getting interesting," said Al.

CHAPTER XV

ANCIENT ENEMIES

BENNETT found the chief in an excited state of mind when he dropped in the next morning.

"Damn it, Al," he exploded, "this watchful waiting policy of yours is going to wreck this whole thing."

"The vice-consul has disappeared. We can't find hide nor hair of him any place. Now the consul is packing up his things to go back and be a high muck-a-muck in Almanian. That lets him out.

"The boys that have been inquiring around about Professor Stieger report to me that he is generally considered to be nuts. He's an old man. He has a cottage at the Sand Dunes and he raises eels for sport. He beat up a street-car conductor once and his wife divorced him eleven years ago, charging eccentricity."

"That's no charge."

"Well, it was mental cruelty, or something, but it had to do with the fact that he's a nut."

"And that proves he killed the professor—I mean the impostor?"

"No, damn it! But it proves he's goofy and he might do something like that. I read up on that scientific fight they had and I don't understand it, but they sure were mad at each other."

"And so . . . ?"

"And so, I'm going to arrest the consul and Professor Stieger today and I'm going to arrest that little squirt, the vice-consul, as soon as I can lay my hands on him."

"Yeah. And spoil everything."

"Who do you think you are? Charlie Chan? That waiting stuff goes good in books, but it don't make for an arrests and convictions record."

"Now wait, Schmitzy. Do you know who's guilty?"

"No, I don't, but I can find out a hell of a lot sooner when I've got them under lock and key. A good stiff punch in the jaw would start some of those fellows talking." He pounded the desk with rage.

"Now listen, Schmitz"—Al's tone was wheedling—"who put you on the right track on this thing?"

"Well, you did. If it is the right track. I damn near pulled that aviator in last night. But I called Doc O'Malley first and he swore the guy couldn't have been shot with a .45. He said the hole was so small it could have been made with an ice pick."

"Oh, ye of little faith!"

"Yeah. But I've got to get some action. The chief is on my neck. Seriously, Al. This watchful waiting stuff is against my nature."

"You remember what you promised me."

"I can't turn the whole police force inside out for a damn reporter—excuse me, Al. But this is serious. This is my job."

"Listen, Schmitz. We're right on the tail of this thing. Give me forty-eight hours. Then you can do what you want."

"Shall I arrest the professor?"

"Don't arrest anybody."

The telephone rang.

"Is that so?" Schmitz said into the transmitter. "We'll stand by. Ask him all the questions I sent you in that letter last night."

He turned to the reporter.

"They think the prof. is coming to."

"Is that so? What happened?"

"He woke up this morning and asked for food. The doctors wouldn't let them question him. Then he passed out again before they could feed him. But they say that everything points to his coming out of that stupor pretty soon."

"I'm going down there," Al announced.

"Yeah. And leave me here itching to arrest a lot of guilty guys and with your orders to lay off!"

"Be reasonable, Schmitz. If this professor talks the whole thing is sewed up. He can tell us plenty. There's darn few men killed in this world who couldn't tell you, before they kicked off, who was going to do the dirty work. You know that. I mean, barring accidents, like the man in the taxicab."

"Yeah. Where did we get with that? I've had that fellow's mug plastered all over the country and not a peep. He could be the unknown soldier, for all I know."

"Well, the professor's the key to the

mystery, and he's coming to, now. I hope he can talk English as well as the man who impersonated him. And if you arrest any of these people you're talking about while I'm gone—well, we're not friends any more. Good-bye."

Al waved a cheery farewell. The chief savagely bit off the end of a cigar as the reporter left, but Bennett felt confident that he would stay in line. He knew that the chief's blusterings were because he was as confused as Al himself, or perhaps a little more so, and he had, perhaps, a little more at stake.

Al called the city desk and told them his intention of going to Fort Wayne.

"But we've got a man there—at your suggestion!" the city editor sputtered.

"There are certain vital questions I want to ask," Al said. "I can be back in short order."

"Damn it, Al," the editor said, "this is the last time you ever put one across on me like this."

"Bye-bye," said Al. "I'm going back to my Indiana home."

He caught the next train and arrived at Fort Wayne by one o'clock. He took a taxi at the station and asked to be driven to the police headquarters.

"That's the chief there," he was told by an idler in the entrance. He saw an excited man stepping from a dingy doorway which evidently led to his private office. The man strode by him, followed by three uniformed men. Al matched his pace and introduced himself as they marched out of the building.

"I've got no time now," the chief of police said. "One of our motor-cycle men has just reported that he has found the cabin where the professor was held and we're on our way. 'Phone that to your paper."

Al was not so easily put off.

"Have you got an extra seat in the car?" he asked.

"No!" the chief roared. "I'll talk to you when I get back."

The reporter kept doggedly at his side.

"I came down here to report your progress," he said. "I don't want to have to wire back merely a report that you are an uncivil——"

"Go to hell!" the chief bellowed.

"And I don't want to wire back a lot of cusswords."

They had arrived at the Cadillac standing at the curb in front of the building.

"I could sit on one of those turn-up seats," Al suggested.

"Oh, then, come along and be damned with you," the chief answered.

They got into the car and were off with siren screaming. The car turned southward and was soon out into the countryside. Al decided not to risk further antagonism. He was silent. So were the other men in the car. When they had gone five miles or so, they left the main highway and continued on a dirt road. After a mile more of bumpy riding, they turned off into a lane. Finally the chauffeur suddenly slammed on the brakes and veered the car off the road, through the weeds and into a clearing. As they rounded a small copse of trees, Al saw a little cabin with a motor-cycle standing outside it. A man in uniform, obviously the rider of the motor-cycle, came out of the cabin door as he heard the noise of their approaching car.

"Hello, Steve," the chief addressed him as

he swung out of the front seat. The man saluted perfunctorily and answered his chief.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"What have you got?" the chief asked.

"Not much, but this is the place, all right."

"How do you know?"

"Come on inside."

Al had quickly tumbled out of his seat and was on the ground. The policemen who were in the back seat had followed suit. The chauffeur, bored, had lighted a pipe and was obviously going to stay behind the wheel. The small group entered the cabin.

It was a rude affair, obviously deserted years ago, but still it had two rooms.

"Here's where the gang stayed," said Steve, the motor-cycle policeman, proudly. He pointed to the room they had first entered. It had a dirt floor. There was an improvised table of wooden cracker boxes, with smaller boxes around it for chairs. A small wood-burning stove stood at one side of the room. On the table was a coffee pot with a number of tin cups beside it and on the stove was a skillet, thick with grease.

The scene was incredible to Al. Like a

movie setting. "And here," said Steve, their guide, "is where they kept the professor."

He led them through a low door into another, smaller room. The floor was covered with corn husks and at one side was a canvas cot.

"Here's the blood," the motor-cycle policeman said, dramatically, as he pointed to a brown incrustation on the canvas cot.

"How do you know this is where the professor was kept?" the chief asked, obviously a little skeptical.

"Well, it isn't far from where he was found. And there's the blood. And the other room shows that there were several people here, watching."

"Looks like it," the chief said, a little non-committally.

Al couldn't restrain himself any longer.

"Did you find anything else?" he asked. "Any papers, or anything like that?"

"Well," said the policeman, "nothing bearing directly on the crime. I found this on the floor, though."

He pulled something from his pocket and started to hand it to the reporter. Then he

hesitated and moved as if to hand it to the chief. That personage, however, was frowning and looking around the room as if disappointed and so the policeman finally thrust his find into Al's outstretched hand.

Bennett unfolded a newspaper clipping and as he did so, he noticed that it was from his own newspaper. When he finally unfolded it with nervous fingers, he saw that it was an account, not of the first story he had telephoned in, but of the next day's follow-up—the story of the unidentified man who was crushed to death when his taxicab was struck by a fire truck.

"That hasn't anything to do with the professor," the policeman apologized. "But it connects up with Chicago."

"I think it's very significant," Bennett replied.

"What is it?" The chief swung around and reached out his hand. Bennett gave him the clipping. He read it through with a frown.

"Well, Steve," he said to the policeman, "this is probably the place. Have you any idea who was here?"

"No, sir."

"How did you run on to this?"

"I met a farmer on the highway. He'd been reading the Fort Wayne papers and he told me about this. He said there'd been a big limousine here for several days, on and off. At first he thought it was picnickers. Then, when it kept coming and going, he thought it was bootleggers. At any rate, he said, it wasn't right, and he thought I should investigate."

"And so you think the professor was here?"

"There's the blood."

"That's right."

The chief suddenly decided to go. He left two of the men there. "Sit around inside," he said. "And keep a lookout. You'll have the drop on them if they come back, but I don't think they will. You'll be relieved tonight."

Back in the city Al thanked the chief for allowing him to accompany the party.

"I'll give you a good write-up," he promised. He took a cab to St. Mary's hospital.

The sister at the desk directed him to the professor's room, or rather rooms. A second

one adjoining had been cleared to provide an antechamber for the police. There Al found the reporter from his paper, Pratt, and his friend, Lieutenant Dixon.

"How's things?" he asked.

Both of them were excited.

"Say, Al. He's coming to," said Pratt. "He's putting up some fight, that boy. The bullet has caused a lung complication, but they think he may pull through. I heard him babbling again just a minute ago."

"Is there someone at the bedside?" Al asked Dixon.

"Yeah, Bassinger is in there. We haven't left him alone a minute."

"Can I go in?" Al asked.

"If you can get away with it."

He cautiously pushed open the door, peered in and then silently disappeared into the room where the professor lay.

A doctor and an interne, on opposite sides of the bed, were bending over the white face on the pillow. Al started as he saw the resemblance to the man who had got off the train just a few days ago in Chicago. Except for the suffering on the face of the man in

bed, he could distinguish no obvious differentiation.

"I can't blame the guy who shot the other fellow," he said to himself. "I'd have been fooled myself."

The man on the bed was mumbling. The interne had a hypodermic needle poised in his hand.

The sergeant, who was standing off to one side, gave him a quiet glance of recognition. Al returned the glance, then decided for the moment to retreat.

"I think he's coming around, all right," he said to the two men in the anteroom.

"He seems to be making the grade," Dixon agreed. "I hope he pulls through. He's a game old duck."

Al offered cigarettes all around. The three of them lit up.

"What's the idea of you being down here?" Pratt asked.

"I've got a few special things I want to ask the old fellow," Al explained. "Things have been happening pretty fast up in Chicago."

He parried their questions deftly as they

sought to find out just what had been going on.

"I think the professor is the key to the whole thing," Al volunteered. "When we can have a talk with him we'll be ready to arrest the murderer of this other fellow and probably the kidnappers of the professor, too."

The doctor, in his white robe, silently opened the door to the other room. Al stopped him as he walked toward the outer door.

"Say, Doctor," he asked eagerly. "Has he come to yet? When can we talk to him?"

The doctor looked down at the young reporter. Then he spoke deliberately.

"I'm very sorry," he said. "The professor has just died."

CHAPTER XVI

THE PROFESSOR'S LETTER

STOLLESBERG, ALMANIA
June 7, 1933

To the Commissioner of Police
Chicago, Illinois.
U. S. A.

DEAR SIR:

I am sending to you confidentially a letter which was left in my possession by my father when he started for America. I believe the information it contains may assist you in bringing his murderer to justice.

Yours very truly,

ANTONIO DEL GRAFKO

P.S. The below letter is a translation which I have made myself.

DEAR SON:

I have written on this envelope "To be opened in case of my death." I have written thus because I shall never return from America

alive. I am a murderer, my son, and I have passed judgment on myself and condemned myself to death. Perhaps in days to come I shall be proved to have been the greatest murderer the world has ever known—greater than Herod who slaughtered the Innocents, worse than all the Tsars.

The field of science, which you chose, perhaps wisely, not to follow, is the most dangerous realm into which man's mind can wander. Science lays open to man the terrific cosmic powers which created our earth and which will destroy it again in due time. Man has no true conception of those terrific powers, but he is learning far too fast, alack. In laboratories men are prying into the secrets of the universe—secrets which they do not need to know and secrets which in time will probably wipe off the face of the earth this entire race of self-seeking human creatures.

I am so unfortunate, my son, as to have discovered one of those secrets which selfish men have been striving to discover, but have so far failed. Two years ago, when I first realized what my experiments were leading to, I decided not to continue them, but I realized that what I had discovered was really so simple to a man of science that others would

undoubtedly stumble on the formula, as I had done. I decided then to go on, and I perfected my discovery, working, as you know, only with poor Sengius. He was the only man who shared the secret of my discovery. With his death I alone possessed this knowledge.

You know that all my inventions up until now have been for the good of mankind. I was proud to contribute my discoveries of the applications of the higher branches of science to man's daily life. Two years ago I was working on another similar project—a device for the transmission of energy through the ether. You can see the tremendous benefit to the world in the perfection of this process.

I realized from the first that there were certain dangers likely to be encountered in these experiments. If energy were transmitted in the actual form of energy, it would be as powerful in this stage of being carried along in the ether as when controlled and used to turn machines—or so it seemed to me. I finally perfected a directed energy ray. The first full and horrible significance of what my experiments were leading to came when I watched flies passing through this ray drop instantaneously to the table, dead. That was only the beginning. Working very cautiously

for my own safety I experimented further, and found that the ray, even in that stage, would kill small animals instantly.

It was then that I decided to give up the experiment entirely. I realized that if it could be carried on through its logical steps it would prove to be a devastating machine of destruction that could wipe out the whole world. In other words, I was actually on the road to perfecting the "death ray," about which there has been so much nonsense in the public press.

The most distressing realization that came to me was that any other scientist, working along the same lines as I was, might just as accidentally stumble onto the same thing. It was so incredibly simple—not to the layman, of course, but to any scientist. It might almost be called a trick of wiring plus the use of certain elements in the filament of the projecting tube.

Sengius, who was working with me, was anxious to continue with the project, purely from the point of view of the debt a scientist owes his profession—to carry on and learn the truth. I finally decided that if the possibilities of the mechanism were really as dangerous as it appeared, I should be doing mankind the greatest good to continue the work and then finally reveal it to the whole

world, simultaneously. No nation would then have any advantage over another and all would be afraid to use the device in war, because it would mean a mutual annihilation of all citizens, combatants or no.

Before we could proceed further with our work on the mechanism, it was necessary, for our own safety, to discover some medium through which the ray could not pass. We had used practically every known substance and found that the ray easily penetrated.

Another year of work and we finally developed a metal which was absolutely impervious to the ray. Then we began developing the device further. Within another eight months we had the machine so arranged that I believed it possible to regulate its power all the way from the strength of the first feeble ray which we had produced in the early days of our experiments to an almost unlimited strength and an unknown possibility of distance projection.

Then, you will remember, Sengius and I took our trip to Africa. We went into the interior and set up our device at one of those watering holes which you have seen pictured in the cinemas, where thousands upon thousands of animals congregate.

We directed a ray six feet wide across a level plain thronged with antelope, zebra, and hartebeeste. Every animal in the path of the ray crumpled instantly to the ground in death. We were terrified with the strength of the machine. Later other animals died too. That led us to experiment on some animals we captured. Instead of turning the ray on vital parts, we directed a small ray on just one portion of the animal. All of them died within an hour or two after such exposure, no matter how far we reduced the strength of the ray.

Sick at heart, and dumfounded as to what to do with the terrific force of destruction we had developed, we started to work our way back to the coast. It was on this journey that poor Sengius died of jungle fever and left me the only one possessing the knowledge which could destroy all life on the earth. Almost dazed, I went on without my friend. One hundred and fifty miles from the point where we had made our experiment, we came upon a deserted village in the jungle. Scores and scores of corpses, in a horrible condition from the African sun, lay about. My guides and bearers almost left me, but we cut our way through the jungle and circled the village. A few miles farther on we ran into some of the former

inhabitants of the village. They told my head guide that their miserable fellow villagers had mysteriously been felled by some strange plague. They had died almost instantly. More than a hundred of them, while others in the village had not been harmed—had not even been ill.

I realized at once that I had been the murderer of these innocent black souls. The ray was even stronger than I had calculated, in my wildest surmises. In my grief I almost decided to turn it on myself and end my life and the secret with it. But I thought again of the possibility that someone else might soon hit upon the discovery. Suppose some one nation—Russia, Japan, for instance, discovered it and used it to its own selfish advantage.

I decided that the only recompense I could make to God would be to give this to the world and forever prevent any one group using this horrible power to kill. I felt that the ghastly fear of it might even stop war forever. The common people would not allow their leaders to enter into a war when they knew that at any moment some desperate enemy might resort to this weapon.

My plan seemed even better to me when I realized that my discovery of the metal which

was impenetrable by this ray was not at all as simple a thing as the device itself. It even included the discovery of a new element, which I did not announce to the world, but which I incorporated in the insulating metal. I decided with elation that I would give the world the deadly discovery and keep the other forever to myself. If I gave the protection too, then it would be used by the strong and the wealthy. Withholding this would make every man, every nation, equal—levelled to a new humility and brotherhood, perhaps, by a common fear of death.

I firmly believe the protection against this ray will not be discovered for centuries to come. Perhaps in that time mankind will be on a new basis of peace and understanding brought through fear—but after all, what matter if we achieve beautiful things through base emotions? It was the end which I sought.

I decided to bring my invention before the world in Chicago at the Century of Progress Exposition, which is to symbolize man's achievements in an age of science. I am leaving tomorrow for the United States, my invention in a plain suitcase which I shall check so that no one will be suspicious and steal it from me. The secret of the death-dealing

power and the protection against it is in my brain. It is not written down on paper anywhere. I have no blueprints, no formulæ. When I get to the Fair, I shall announce to the world what I am about to unfold. The newspaper publicity will be world-wide and no one will be unaware of the terrific menace. Scientists from all over will come and I shall explain to each exactly how the death-dealing ray is produced. I shall have diagrams printed in the newspapers so that even many lay scientists may understand. The man in the street will tremble and a horrible cry shall go up to the leaders of the people and the leaders shall know that they never again can make war.

I will have an exhibit in a little booth. Harmless experiments with guinea pigs will be enough, or I can kill cattle if a stronger proof is needed.

Then, my son, when the entire world knows all of the truth about my invention, and before anybody knows how to make the metal which renders it harmless, I shall some day wave my hand across the face of the projecting lens, step down to the shores of Lake Michigan, stand there and imagine I am looking across the ocean to where my loved ones are, and await the death I know will follow.

I do not fear death. My life has almost run its course. I have unwittingly killed my fellow men, but if the feeling of the common people is what I think it is, I shall have saved millions of lives in the future which might have been sacrificed in selfish, nationalistic war.

Some news of my secret has leaked out already and you may have to open this letter before I reach the Fair. The king knows in general what I have discovered and is in sympathy with my plan. He is great enough, and kind enough, to see that what I plan to do is the only thing. Others in our country are not so wise.

I have been approached by two different men, almost criminals in type. One of them claimed to represent our present fascisti government. He offered me five million dollars for my invention, and when I refused, threatened me with death if I carried out my plan. Another man came to me and said he was from the communist party. He begged me not to go through with my plan because he said that his international party feared that the capitalistic nations, at present so afraid of communism, might throw discretion to the winds, and use this terrible instrument in trying to wipe out

communistic nations. He was afraid that the great capitalistic countries might be able to act quickly with their scientific laboratories and great factories, and blot out other nations entirely.

I denied to each of these men that he knew the secret of my invention, but it was obvious to me that they knew in general what I had discovered and put a different interpretation from mine on the results of my plan to give it to the world.

Only God can judge me finally, but I am sure I am right and that my last discovery, which I once feared would be a curse, shall be a blessing forever more.

You will understand now why I bade you all good-bye so fervently, and why I insisted on coming alone. I hope that you will all be proud of your father and that you will feel that he has atoned for his great sin.

I leave you to God's mercy and ask His blessings on you always.

YOUR FATHER

Al slowly put the letter down on the chief's desk. His hands were cold and damp with suppressed excitement, but he did not speak

immediately. He felt almost a reverence for the old man who had died two days before on a bed in St. Mary's hospital in a little Indiana town.

Such a strange climax to so strange and tremendous a plan which the old professor's brain had developed out of his confusion at having discovered a horrible instrument of wholesale death.

"He had it worked out pretty well," Al said quietly to the chief.

"Do you think the world would have reacted the way he said?"

"I think it would have ended war forever."

"The suitcase is still at the bottom of the lake."

"I'd put a depth bomb down there and blow it to perdition. Anyway, the secret is in the professor's brain and those brain cells are already disintegrating."

The two men sat silent for a time. It was a bright sunny morning, but the outer world seemed very distant.

"That letter gives me the jim-jams," Al said.

"Me too," the chief agreed. He puffed furiously at his cigar. "You know what to do when you've got the blues and the jim-jams?" he asked Al.

"What?"

"Work like the very devil."

Al rose to his feet.

"You're right," he said. "Any man who would kill a gentle old soul like the professor is a dirty rat and ought to burn in the chair."

"Are you sure enough yet?"

"Almost certain."

"Shall we make arrests now?"

"No. I want one more thing so we'll have an air-tight case in court. I'm taking a run out into the country now on what we reporters like to call a mystery mission. If you can spare the time, I'd like you to make a little expedition with me tonight!"

"What for?"

"The final damning piece of evidence—the weapon."

"How are you going to get it?"

"By a little burglary, with your kind assistance."

"Good Lord, Al! What are you trying to let me in for? I can't countenance anything like that."

"I suppose you'd like to walk up there with a search warrant and get the guy all suspicious. Then, if you didn't find the evidence, the court would release him on a *habeas corpus* writ and he could get out of the country."

"Can't you get in without my help?"

"I've already tried the front door, but he must have sixteen different kinds of fancy bolts on it. I can't get anywhere that way and I don't want to use a jimmy. That would be as bad as a search warrant. I've got to do a little cat burglar stuff and I don't want to get shot while doing it. You'll just have to stand by."

"Well, I suppose I could do that. But it isn't dignified, and it would mean my job if anyone ever found out."

"I knew you'd help, Schmitz."

"Only too pleased," the chief said, with a note of sarcasm in his voice. "But, boy, if you don't deliver the goods, I'm going to skin you alive."

"Fine," said Al. "I'll be back here at ten o'clock tonight. Better have a crack squad along. I wouldn't be surprised if there would be a little shooting."

CHAPTER XVII

DAMNING EVIDENCE

AL HAD borrowed the car belonging to his friend Carl Ross for his jaunt to the country, and as he drove back toward Chicago he felt positively jubilant. He had made a new discovery and he felt certain that he was near the end of the long and winding trail of conflicting evidence and disappointment which he had been following since the World's Fair murder.

He parked the car on Walton Place and took the keys up to his friend in the Drake.

"Don't forget our date tonight," he said.

"Don't worry," Ross assured him. "It would take an earthquake to make me miss this evening's entertainment."

It was after five o'clock and Al had plenty of time before his contemplated adventure later in the evening. He dropped in at the *Journal* office, hoping to find Helen there. He met her coming out of the door as he was about to enter.

"What a lucky fellow I am, you lucky, lucky fool, Al Bennett," he said, grinning as their eyes met.

"You've been drinking again," she said with a smile.

"Not a drop," he assured her. "But I'm just about to begin. How fortunate that we should meet at the cocktail hour."

"I'm on my way home," the girl said.

"You—I mean we—are on our way to 777, that famous address known to every lover of good liquor and long credit."

"Well, if you insist. But only one or two."

When they were seated at the little table in the corner of the bar, Al asked, "What'll it be?"

"It's so warm," she replied, "that I think I'll have a very unfeminine drink. A brandy and soda with a lot of ice."

"We'll have two of those."

As they sipped the cooling drinks the girl asked, "Why are you so jubilant today? Have you solved your great mystery yet?"

"Absolutely," Al said. "But nobody knows it yet but me—and now you, of course."

"Tell me all about it."

"Nix. Read it in tomorrow's papers."

"The dénouement is so close upon us then?"

"Just around the corner."

"What have you been doing in the country?"

"I've been out in the fields picking daisies."

"Oh, I see you're going to be very mysterious. How about ordering me another drink? I have nothing but ice left, you'll please notice."

"Drink to me only with thine ice," Al suggested. The girl grimaced.

"I told you I didn't like puns," she said with exaggerated pain in her voice.

"I hate 'em," Al agreed. "Waiter! She wants another brandy and soda I."

"I'm either going to go home or scream or both if you don't stop that," she warned.

"If I promise to stop will you have supper with me here? If you have the time the chef can fix us a lobster that's really not so bad."

The girl accepted his invitation and they laughed and chatted happily through the dinner.

"I'm doing a little more sleuthing tonight,"

Al announced. "The last for some time, I hope."

"Oh, may I come along?"

"Not tonight. This isn't parlor sleuthing. This is—er—well, parlor, bedroom and bath sleuthing. Some people call it burglary. By the way, I hope you never use the verb burglarize. Very *gauche*, don't you agree?"

"All! You're not serious."

"Yes, I am. But I'm becoming a burglar with the full knowledge and consent of the police."

"But isn't it dangerous, anyway?"

"Indeed it is. This may be the last meal we'll ever eat together. Write a nice obit. for me, won't you?"

"I don't like to hear you discuss such a possibility so lightly. Please promise me you won't do it. Once before, you know, I advised you against doing something foolish."

"This is different, and I'm going through with it," Al said firmly. "I got this idea when I was sober—very sober."

To his relief the reporter discovered that despite the three or four drinks he had taken this evening he did not reveal to the girl

the details of his discoveries to date. "I've got to keep mum even to her. No exceptions," he decided. And he managed to evade her questions or parry them with varyingly successful repartee.

At nine-thirty he took her home and left her, to his surprise with tears glistening in her eyes.

"I didn't think she cared that much," he said, with a sigh of satisfaction as his taxicab took him to the detective bureau.

"Any news?" he asked Schmitz.

"Well, Miss Cardinal called up to say that we needn't bother any more about her fiancé, the vice-consul," he told the reporter. "She says he's perfectly safe and that she had a letter from him assuring her that very confidential affairs had necessitated his mysterious disappearance."

"Where was the letter from?"

"Posted in Chicago this morning. She swore it didn't reveal his whereabouts. I sent a man up there anyway and he looked at the letter, after a little argument. It was just as she said."

"Well, that's interesting anyway. How about the consul?"

"We haven't been able to pick up his trail yet. He's been flitting from here to there, but I'm sure he hasn't left town."

"So am I," said Al.

"Then I must be right!" The chief was still sarcastic with the young reporter. "But how about you? Any news?"

"Well, not exactly news," Al answered, but I have some interesting little exhibits."

He put his hand into his side coat pocket and drew it out casually. Then he opened it over the blotter on the chief's desk. A handful of small pieces of metal dropped with a rattle on the blotter. The chief's eyes opened wide with amazement. More than a score of .22-calibre bullets, all pointed, all steel-jacketed, lay on his desk before his nose.

"Ever see one of those before?"

"Once before," the chief agreed.

"I needn't ask you where," Al said coolly.

"But where in the devil did you get these?"

"Ran on them. Out at the summer place our boy friend has rented near Barrington so

he can keep up his social obligations. I was doing a little stalking in the woods *à la* Unga, the scout, when I found myself leaning up against a tree that had a lot of little holes in it, and one great big hole. I got to work with my knife, but couldn't get anywhere with it, so I drove back to the hardware store in Barrington and bought myself a boy scout hatchet. I got this much of a crop in ten minutes. I was afraid to work too long. There was a nail in the tree where I assume a target had been hung and I also presume that this flock of bullets was directly behind the bull's-eye."

"Let's arrest the mug now."

"Nope. I still want to burgle. Come on, let's go. I can't disappoint my friend Ross."

The chief grumbled. "Of all the damned foolishness!" But he decided that, having gone as far as he had with this reporter (and he wished he hadn't), he might as well play ball with him to the end.

"I may have to go into two houses," the reporter explained. "But I think the first one will do the trick. They're both close together anyway."

He explained the details of his plan to the chief.

"You see, my friend Ross has an apartment right next door across a narrow courtyard. There isn't more than five feet between the windows. He's got a plank in his rooms now. Above him is an empty apartment that I can get into, because I have already tried and my pass key works. That empty apartment is just across from the one we want to get into. I don't think this baby locks his windows, because he's four flights up. I'll be in there in no time at all. All I want is for your men to stand down below at the front and back of the court so that the man on the beat doesn't happen by and wing me while I'm crossing the canyon on my plank bridge."

"We can do that. But what if he's at home?"

"He drove into his place in the country just as I was leaving this afternoon," said Al.

The squad car drew up five doors away from the building in which Ross lived. The chief and his two men got out and Al briefly showed them the layout. The two men were posted front and rear, and Bennett and

Schmitz entered the vestibule and rang the doorbell to Ross's apartment.

Al introduced the two men. Ross was trembling with excitement.

"The plank's already upstairs," he said in a husky voice. "I've been watching the apartment across the court. There isn't a light there and there isn't any in the one directly across from here either. I don't think anybody will hear or see you."

"You two had better stay down here," Al said.

"No, we'll come along upstairs," the chief answered, and the three of them mounted the creaking stairway to the empty apartment above. Ross unlocked the door with the key Al had left him. Al opened the window and the three of them slid the plank as silently as possible across the sill until the other end rested firmly on the sill of the window opposite.

"Bye-bye," said Al, and raised his knee to the sill.

"Better take my gun," the chief suggested.

"Thanks. I've got my own."

He crawled quickly across the plank and

raised the window opposite. In the moonlight they could see clearly his triumphant smile which he flashed on them as he stepped down into the room.

In an instant a light flashed on in the apartment across the court.

"My God! What's that?" Ross asked nervously. He soon realized, however, that Al himself had turned it on. "The nerve of him," he thought.

They could see the reporter, or his quickly moving shadow, hurrying rapidly around. After five minutes they could see his shadow no more. He had apparently gone into another room. Ten, fifteen minutes passed. The tension in the dark and empty apartment was becoming terrific. The chief cursed for having let himself in for such a nefarious bit of business, but reflected that he would not have dared search without a warrant, or he might have found nothing, yet his prey would have escaped.

At last the light went out in the apartment across the court, and Al appeared at the window. He crawled out gingerly and the watchers could see that he had two oblong

black boxes in his hands. Carefully setting them down on the narrow sill, and closing the window behind him, he edged his way back along the plank, pushing the boxes in front of him. When he had got through the window of the apartment in which the two men were waiting, he was panting with excitement.

"Pull the plank back and shut the window," he said hoarsely, "And come with me, out into the light."

"What have you got?" the chief demanded, his voice shaking with the same excitement that the reporter was displaying.

In the darkness they could hear the dumfounded surprise in the reporter's voice. He seemed almost dazed at his discovery.

"Let's get out of here and find what the devil you've got," the chief said, urging Al toward the door.

Outside in the hall there was a light on the landing. They stopped before going downstairs and Al held up his trophies for their inspection. Two hand motion-picture cameras of the same make.

"Baby, baby, baby!" he said ecstatically. "I

never thought it would be as good as this."

"What the devil?" said the chief angrily.

"Are you kidding us?"

"No. Look here—but let's go downstairs. Somebody might come by."

"Well, for God's sake, make it snappy!" the chief exclaimed.

Ross's mouth gaped.

Safely inside the apartment downstairs, Al explained.

"First," he said, turning one of the small hand cameras around so that he could look at the lens, "I found this. It didn't seem unusual and it was sitting right out on a dressing table.

"I didn't even bother to look at it a second time. Then, under some old clothes on the closet floor, I found this."

He held out the other camera.

"I wondered why it was hidden and so I opened it. It was just an ordinary motion-picture camera. This guy is super-clever. He knew that two cameras sitting around might look funny."

"Yeah," said the chief. "Make it snappy, Al."

"That made me wonder about the other camera which was sitting right out in broad daylight, so to speak, and I went back and opened it. Here, I'll show you."

He dropped down to a chair beside the table, put the camera down and removed the side of the box.

"There you are," he said. "That's the weapon in the World's Fair murder."

The chief and Al's friend looked baffled as they peered into the camera.

"Here," Al explained, pointing to a metal tube extending the length of the box, "is the barrel of the pistol. This oblong thing down here is the magazine." He deftly opened the metal casing and displayed a row of pellets, .22-calibre bullets, sharp-pointed, steel-jacketed.

"But there's no shells on them," the chief exclaimed.

"Right," Al agreed. "You see this little thing like a tank along the bottom of the case? That's the compressed air. It must have a tremendous pressure. I shot the thing off in the apartment and the bullet went clear to hell and gone in the wall. You didn't hear

a shot, did you? Well, they didn't hear one at the Fair grounds either."

"By God, Al!" exclaimed the chief. "I never saw a device like that before in all my days and I've seen some tricky killings, too. And now, how about the arrests?"

"O.K. And let's make it snappy."

Al bade his friend good-bye and thanked him for his help. He and the chief rushed down and the latter called the two lieutenants. They all piled into the squad car and drove to the Chicago Avenue station. There the chief called Sheriff Truesdale of Lake County.

"Meet me with a squad at Barrington in three-quarters of an hour," he urged the sheriff. "I'll explain later."

Then he called the police radio station.

"Ask the two northeast squads that are cruising now to meet me at Lawrence and Elston right away," he ordered. "Send that bulletin and no other until you make contact."

Out in the street again he jumped into the seat beside the driver.

"Let's go!" he ordered.

The big car, with siren screaming, raced down Chicago Avenue.

CHAPTER XVIII

AL GETS A STORY

"BUT how in hell," Lieutenant Dixon shouted into Al's ear as they speeded northwest on Elston Avenue, "did you ever figure out ahead of time that the professor was shot in the back?"

"Only possible conclusion," Al shouted back. "Tell you more about it under better circumstances."

But to Lieutenant Dixon the rear seat of a swaying, speeding, screeching squad car was as pleasant a place for a little chat as any other. He persisted.

"What do you mean—only conclusion?" he said.

"Bullet that hit the professor—the impostor, that is—didn't hit the floor of the rostrum. Bullet that hit the floor of the platform didn't go through the professor," Al explained, trying to save words.

"I don't quite get it," the lieutenant complained.

"I'll tell you later."

"Just explain about the movie camera."

Al complied grudgingly.

"The guy that did it," he said, "is sitting on the platform behind the speaker. He has his camera with him. Suddenly the airplanes come by overhead. He has his camera on the floor, tips it up, and pulls the trigger, shooting backward into the floor behind him. That puts the bullet in the floor. Then he raises the camera as if to take a picture of the airplanes. He's still sitting down, remember, and the professor is standing a couple of steps above the floor on the elevated rostrum in front of him. On the way up with his camera he just hesitates a minute when his finder is over the professor's heart and he plugs him. Then he stands up with the rest of the crowd and pretends to be taking pictures of the airplanes."

"But the coroner can tell which way a bullet enters a body," the lieutenant objected.

"Everybody thought he was shot from in front," Al reminded him. "The bullet was so small, so sharp, and covered with steel so it

didn't spread. The hole was small and closed up with blood and all. I suppose if they had that body now and made an examination, knowing what we know, they might find some little bits of cloth in the wound near the back, but they didn't go into any microscopic examinations because they weren't indicated. The angle fooled them too, and it looked logical that he'd been shot from above and in front."

"That's a wow!" the lieutenant declared.

He tried to urge Al to further talk, but the reporter felt the strain too much. It was almost impossible to think.

It had all come to him like a flash the minute he discovered the movie-camera case with the devilish contrivance inside. He had long known, or had felt certain, that the impostor-professor had been shot through the back. That thought had come to him the day he and the chief were looking over the scene at the Science Building. Yet how could a man shoot on that crowded platform, how would he dare wield a gun, even a small one, in such a public assemblage? If it had been winter-time and men had been wearing overcoats,

it might have been possible, but even then the question of the aim would have been difficult. And it would have been hard to get that angle on the bullet which threw everyone off the track for so long by making them think the shot had come from above and in front of the speaker's stand.

And, as the chief had pointed out to him, why were there no powder stains on the floor if the assassin had really fired that bullet merely as a blind? Now all was clear, and Al rejoiced to think that he had fitted together the last vital pieces of his jig-saw puzzle. And they interlocked more perfectly than he had dared to hope.

Now all that remained was to seize the murderer and from him get the few remaining unknown facts cleared up. Al was not yet sure that the man who had done the killing at the Fair knew whether he was killing an impostor or the real professor. He was therefore not sure whether this man was connected with the gang that had kidnapped the real professor at Fort Wayne. This he hoped to find out within the next hour.

At intervals between the screams of the

siren, Al could hear the radio in the car droning out the chief's message.

"Squads sixty-seven and sixty-nine report at once to Chief Schmitzendorf at Elston and Lawrence. Squads sixty-seven and sixty-nine report at once to Chief Schmitzendorf at Elston and Lawrence. Station WPDC, Chicago."

Suddenly the car came to a sickening stop. Al looked out and saw that they were standing by another detective bureau car. Just ahead of it was a third. Radio had sent the two squads to their appointment before the chief arrived. The squad leaders conferred with their chief a moment, then dashed back to their own cars.

"No sirens after we get within a mile of Barrington," the chief had ordered. "It'll be better to slow up a bit rather than to let the bird know we're coming."

Now there were three of the screaming monsters roaring down the cement highway beyond the street-car tracks on Milwaukee Avenue, past the quiet cemeteries.

It was after midnight. Gay colored lights still burned around the wayside roadhouses.

The moon was full and clear and shone like silver on the fields. From Milwaukee Avenue the cavalcade sped around the corner of the county police station and on down Ballard Road to the Rand Road, and the Northwest Highway. Once on this road they shot like chariots of hell through the little towns along the way. As they crossed the Dundee Road the driver of the chief's car stopped the screeching of the siren and the cars behind followed suit. Their speed was hardly slackened, however, and in another three minutes they were in the little town of Barrington.

"Turn left at the railroad tracks," Al instructed the driver.

Just after they swung across the tracks they saw the village constable holding up his hand. With difficulty the driver stopped.

"Sheriff Truesdale told me to tell you he's gone on," the policeman panted. "There's a big shooting affair down the road and he went there. Maybe it's the same place you're headed for."

"Thanks," said the chief, and then to the driver, "Let's get going."

"Straight ahead on this road!" Al shouted.

The chief turned around as they speeded on.

"What do you make of that?" he shouted at Al.

The reporter shrugged his shoulders. As they neared the house they sought, about a mile and a half outside of town, Al tapped the driver on the shoulder and indicated that he should slow down. They rounded a curve in the road and noticed a big car pulling up at the side of the road ahead of them. The two men beside Al were holding shot-guns in their hands. Five men jumped out of the automobile ahead and the chief's car slowed down too.

"Careful," Schmitzendorf warned.

From the house, the top of which could be seen over the trees, came a volley of shots.

"Machine gun," grunted Schmitz, peering ahead. "It's O.K." he added the next instant as he suddenly saw that two of the men who had jumped out of the car ahead were uniformed. "That's the sheriff."

The driver gave a couple of sharp toots on his horn to advise the sheriff's men that they were there and the chief jumped out and

waved. The other two Chicago cars had drawn up behind and now all the men were on the road, shotguns and machine guns in hand.

They trotted up to the sheriff's crowd. No more shots came from the direction of the house.

"We'd better deploy around the place and approach gradually," the chief suggested. The sheriff nodded his head, and they sent half their men around behind.

The sheriff, the chief and his two trusted aids, and Al walked cautiously down the road to the entrance to the grounds in front of the house. They peered around the heavy masonry column which formed one side of the arched gate over the driveway.

Grotesque in the moonlight, two men lay sprawled on the lawn. They were still, their guns on the grass beside them. A third was crawling pitifully away toward the bushes at the far side of the lawn.

"Here, Al, come back here, you damned fool!" the chief shouted in alarm.

The reporter was running toward the man who was crawling away. Before he reached

him the wounded man collapsed on his face in the grass. Al went up to him. The other policemen were running across the lawn now. The reporter kicked at the gun which the wounded man had been dragging along. He booted it several feet away across the lawn. Then he dropped to the man's side, turned him over, and rested his head on his knee.

The man's eyes were rolling, his face looked green in the moonlight. Blood was sogging his vest. He was dying.

For a moment sanity seemed to come into his eyes. He stared up at Al.

"I got him. I got the bastard," he said, the blood bubbling in his throat.

"Got who?" Al urged.

"He shot my cousin in the back, the rat. But I got . . ."

His words oozed away. Suddenly his eyes rolled violently. They seemed to be all whites. And then the vice-consul, the society man, fiancé of Letitia Cardinal, died in Bennett's arms.

"Go easy in the house," the chief warned.

Al laid the dead man's head back on the grass and followed the police.

"Nobody downstairs," the sheriff reported. "We've been in every room. If there were any servants around they must have ducked when the shooting started."

The party gingerly mounted the stairs.

They found him at his bedroom window, a sub-machine gun at the side of his limp body. The sheriff gave a tug to the shoulder and the body toppled backward. In the proud forehead of Sig. Benefio, Almanian consul and cabinet minister elect, was a gaping red hole, and blood in little streams ran down his ashen face and stained his strong white grinning teeth.

"So that was it," said Al to the chief. "The little vice-consul was with the Fort Wayne gang, and it was his cousin they fixed up to look like the professor."

"Damn it," the chief said. "We haven't got anybody to try in court."

"What of it?" asked Al. "Gang vengeance is more powerful than court justice. This vengeance was sure and there's no appeal."

"This guy's got gloves on," the sheriff interrupted in surprise.

"Well, I'll be!"

Al was at the writing desk. "Look at this," he said. "Gloves don't leave finger prints."

He held an unfinished letter up to the chief.

"It's addressed to you," he said. "But the writer was apparently interrupted."

The chief took the letter. It was printed and not in handwriting.

"I know who killed the man at the World's Fair, and I . . ." it began.

"He ought to know," said Al grimly.

The chief grunted in disgust. "A squawker, eh?" he said. "I'm glad they croaked him. He was even trying to put his own dirty killing on the shoulders of the other bunch."

"Well, you'd never have found out about the Fort Wayne gang if this fellow hadn't plugged them for you just now, when they came here to give him a dose of what he gave their pal at the World's Fair," Al suggested. "I didn't even know the vice-consul was in with them."

"You can't know everything, Al."

"Say, chief, it's only one o'clock," the reporter said in sudden consternation. "That gives the morning papers a chance on this."

"I was just thinking," said Schmitz with a

smile. "That gang of desperadoes undoubtedly cut the telephone wires before they attacked, and we've still got a lot of investigating to do around here."

He looked at his driver who had come into the room.

"You've got a pair of wire-cutting pliers in the car, haven't you?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"I'll tell you what to do with them in a minute, and after that I want you to drive Al back to town. Then come right back here for me, and don't stop anywhere or talk to anyone."

"Yes, sir."

"Gee, Schmitz. Thanks!" Al's eyes were gleaming with pleasure and excitement. He walked over to the chief and whispered to him.

"Take care of the sheriff, too, won't you?" he begged. "Of course he doesn't know much, but I don't want him even to tell about this shooting until I've told it first in the *Journal*."

The chief of detectives smiled broadly at the reporter. He grasped the young man's hand and shook it warmly.

"Anything you say, Al," he said, with no hint of sarcasm in his voice this time. "Tell them about it, your theories, the empty coffin, the missing fiancé, the professor's letter, and the death ray. Tell them everything. Put all those facts together and let them spell MOTHER if they want to. That swell girl reporter that you were telling me about will probably be pretty interested to see what you have to say, too. This is your story, and you should break it."

"Baby, and how!" Al grinned.

THE END

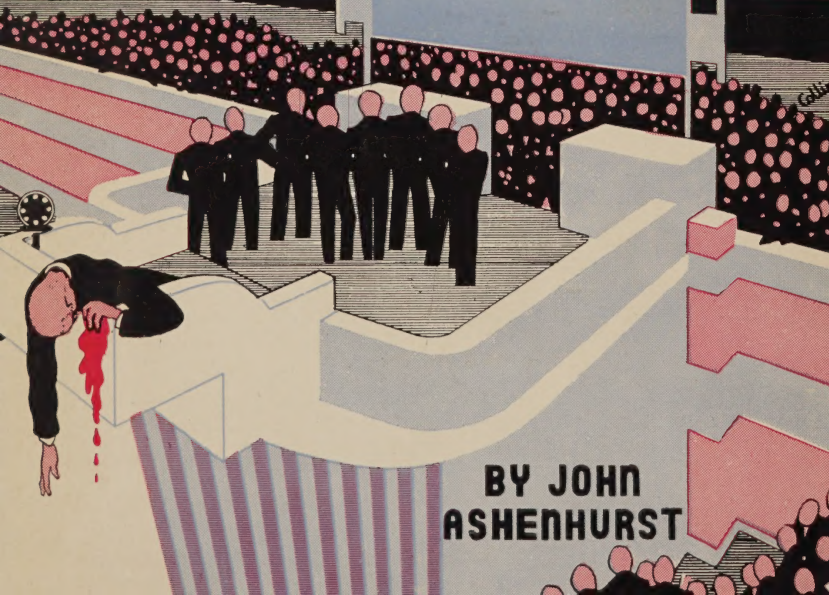
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